

THE APOCALYPSE

With a Foreword and Notes

by

A. L. MAYCOCK



dacre press
westminster

The Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine has been in every age a puzzle to the devout and a happy hunting-ground for the propagandist. It is to-day alternately depreciated as sub-Christian in tone or exalted as a unique source of information on the future course of events.

Mr. A. L. Maycock, already known for his fascinating study of Nicholas Ferrar and Little Gidding, here gives us an interpretation of this mysterious Book, which is concerned (to quote his own foreword) 'not with special incidents or persons, but with the great mysteries of God's providence and judgment in the world and with the ultimate truths of human destiny'.

The special interest of the Book for the present time is revealed by the method of treatment which he adopts. For the canvas on which the great scenes of the Apocalypse are depicted is large enough to embrace the whole course of world-history; while the imagery employed by the New Testament prophet is here so expounded as to be clearly relevant to the spiritual problems of every individual.



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IN PIAM MEMORIAM

H. W. M.

Consociet nos Dominus in Paradiso

'The Apocalypse is a great sea, full of storms and tempests, in which all human wisdom is devoured.'

RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR

'The Apocalypse fills every passage of the Old Testament with life; confirms the patristic and Catholic mode of interpretation; makes the whole of Scripture harmonious and complete, crowning and perfecting and bringing it home to us with universal application as altogether divine. Without it the Scriptures themselves were as a house without a roof.'

ISAAC WILLIAMS

'Let no man who is not in Christ imagine that the Revelation of St. John is addressed to him. Let no man imagine that, if he has not found Christ, he will find Him here. The book will rather perplex and puzzle, more probably offend him. Here, if anywhere, faith and love are the key to knowledge, not knowledge the key to faith and love.'

WILLIAM MILLIGAN

FOREWORD

No attempt has been made in these pages to provide a detailed commentary on St. John's Apocalypse. The writer is incompetent to undertake such a task; and indeed, there would be little point in adding to the already numerous commentaries on the book that have been published in recent years. The notes which follow have, at once, a wider and a more modest aim. Whilst taking proper account of the conclusions of scholars on matters of criticism and exegesis, we have tried to focus our attention on the book's universal meaning and on the primary mysteries of the Christian Faith which it illuminates.

The Apocalypse sums up the teaching of the whole Canon of the Scriptures, raising the mind of the reader far above the level of all earthly standards of judgment and showing how things stand for ever between God and man. It is a book profoundly mysterious as a whole and in its parts. It lends itself to the widest variety of interpretation. So easily is it misunderstood, so readily are its symbols misapplied, that all through the Christian ages there have been writers who have viewed it, if not with suspicion and mistrust, at least with caution and with an unwillingness to probe too deeply into the possible significance of all its details. Its visions have formed the basis of all kinds of wild predictions, and at various times have been made the instrument of sectarian and political propaganda. Any number of historical characters from Nero onwards have been identified with its great symbolic figures. In all these ways, and in many others, the true meaning and purpose

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of the book have been obscured, its divine character has been lost sight of, and its unique dignity degraded.

Throughout the Apocalypse there are numerous allusions to the circumstances and events of the times in which it was recorded. That is so obvious as to need no elaboration. But the mysteries here revealed are altogether transcendent of time; they are of universal application. Without declaring whether it is to be a long time or a short, they relate to the whole Christian age between the Incarnation and the final coming of Christ to judge the world. The Apocalypse is the enrichment and fulfilment of all that had been revealed to the prophets. It speaks in terms of the utmost urgency to Christians in every age, in every country and in every variety of worldly circumstance. It is independent of time and place, not because it deals in vague generalisations or merely abstract principles, but because the truths which it proclaims are of God. It embraces the whole course of history, not because it outlines a Christian philosophy of history, but because it displays the supernatural order penetrating, fulfilling and transcending the natural.

We must, then, unhesitatingly reject any line of interpretation which treats the book as predictive of actual historical events. Any such method of approach can only lead us into a series of unprofitable guesses and speculations. We must realise that we shall be dealing, not with special incidents or persons, but with the great mysteries of God's providence and judgment in the world, and with the ultimate truths of human destiny. Everything, therefore, depends on our taking a sufficiently wide view of the symbols employed by the sacred writer in describing his visions. We must at all costs avoid narrow interpretations which would limit the meaning of the symbols to local or temporal circumstances. For instance, the idea that St.

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John used symbolical language in order to conceal his meaning from the authorities of imperial Rome is quite unsound. On the contrary, as we shall see, he frequently goes out of his way to explain the meaning of his symbols, like a man pausing to answer questions that might reasonably arise in the minds of his readers.

On this matter there is no need to anticipate what will be said in the notes which follow. But the general observation may be made that symbols are a form of speech and must therefore be interpreted in accordance with the self-evident principles by which all speech is understood. For example, a symbol cannot mean one thing in one place and something totally different in another. It is true that St. John scarcely gives us the chance of committing this error, for he is the most consistent and orderly of writers; nevertheless, the point needs to be kept in mind, especially in the interpretation of numbers.

Now it is clear, to take a concrete instance, that in the vision of the sealing of the tribes of Israel the number 144,000 is to be understood symbolically and not literally; the same quite obviously applies in the visions of the dragon with his 'seven heads and ten horns', in the description of the treading of the winepress whence blood came out 'by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs', and in numerous other places. Our task is to understand the spiritual significance of the number employed, and thence to seek the interpretation of the particular mystery. But the important point is that this principle must be applied consistently throughout the book. We would suggest that there is no single instance in the Apocalypse of a number being used in the literal sense, apart from the 'seven churches' to whom the letters of chapters II and III are directed. All is symbolic. When we read of the harlot city of Babylon that 'the seven heads

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are seven mountains on which the woman sitteth', we are introducing confusion and inconsistency if we suppose that the seven mountains are to be understood literally and if we go on to identify Babylon with the imperial city of Rome. When we are told of the binding of Satan and the reign of the elect for a thousand years, we shall be carried into the wildest realms of speculation if we imagine that an actual millennium is meant, and we shall completely miss the true interpretation of the vision. In the imagery of the Scriptures the primary numbers have definite symbolic meanings, to which St. John most carefully adheres. Once we have grasped those meanings, we must try to apply them consistently and in every case; otherwise we shall get into hopeless difficulties.

Amongst the many points of comparison between St. John's Gospel and his Apocalypse the predominance of the number 7 in both books is noteworthy. Like the Gospel, the Apocalypse falls into seven clearly marked divisions. In the Gospel seven miracles are recorded, and seven discourses of our Lord on different occasions; there are the seven similitudes in which He speaks of Himself—'I am the good shepherd,' 'I am the light of the world.' and so forth. In the Apocalypse we have the letters to the seven churches, the judgments of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven golden bowls, and the seven kings who reign with the beast from the sea; the book contains seven benedictions and seven anthems. The point need not be elaborated; it is simply an illustration of the close correspondence of thought and teaching that unites the two books. The Apocalypse, in fact, stands to St. John's Gospel in much the same relationship as the Acts of the Apostles bears to the Gospel of St. Luke. It continues and completes the Gospel, showing how the life of the Church is nothing less than a continuation or exten-

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sion of the life of Christ. As He had declared Himself the light of the world, so He had commissioned His followers to go forth as bearing within themselves that same light and as sharers with Him of a common task. 'For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.'¹

It is, then, with the Church in her present condition of pilgrimage in the world that the Apocalypse is primarily concerned. The book is no chronicle of actual events; and in spite of what first impressions might suggest, there seem to be only one or two passing allusions to the consummation of all things and the final judgment. The Apocalypse, as Milligan well expresses it, is the revelation, as applied to the Church in the present world, of three great ideas which St. John had seen exemplified in the life of our Lord Himself—conflict, preservation and triumph. We see, upon the most tremendous canvas, the age-long struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness—a struggle of which this world will be the arena until the end of time, though the final issue is not in doubt. On the one hand we see the Church as the elect Bride of Christ, the true home of every human soul, glorious with every divine endowment, sacred and inviolate, the vessel of God's purpose of salvation for the whole earth; on the other, we see her corrupted and contaminated by her ready alliance with the world, prostituting herself to the world like any harlot, and filling up within herself the mystery of iniquity. And the two pictures are one. There are not two Churches, a true and a false, a divine and a human. But all that is in the world is disordered by sin; and within the Kingdom of God on earth the wheat and the tares must grow together until the harvest.

¹Acts xiii. 47.

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To St. John the life of the Church, and hence the life of the individual Christian, is not merely a continuation of the life of Christ. His conception of the Christian vocation goes deeper than this. The Christian life is also to be regarded as recapitulating the life of Christ. The Church must go forth, as He went forth, to meet the contempt and hatred of the world, to be slighted and misunderstood, to suffer as He suffered, to follow with Him the way of the cross, 'bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus' in the certain assurance of restoration and resurrection in Him. Time and again in her history the Church has followed out this bitter path to a death which seemed to the world final; time and again she has risen again to a renewal of her witness and ministry. This is one of the central thoughts of the Apocalypse. It is brought out with special vividness in the vision of the Two Witnesses and, later, in the vision of the Woman and the Dragon; but it runs through the whole book from beginning to end and is dominant in the great series of judgments embraced by the Seals, the Trumpets and the Bowls.

'Not for eloquence in preaching was the glory of that Presence given, nor for wisdom or piety or benevolence or the working of miracles or the understanding of all wisdom and all knowledge: it was given that the nations might find in their midst a true and living tabernacle, through whose veil of selfless, self-crucifying love there might be "boldness and access in confidence" for all.

'Thus Israel came to its fulness in our Lord as Love Incarnate; as Humanity so surrendered to God that it could represent all mankind before Him, as Humanity so possessed by God that it could mediate to all men the new covenant of His grace. To be His servant on earth and His high priest in the heavenly places, to offer in its own body the Sacrifice by which earth and heaven were

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made one, this was the ministry to which it had been called from before the ages and which was now committed irrevocably into its hands.¹

Such, then, is the vocation of the Christian Church; and it is characteristic of St. John that he nowhere looks forward to any general conversion of mankind. In his view, the Church will always be a minority, following a way of life which is too hard even for many of her professing members. The visions of the Apocalypse shew, under a variety of symbols, how absolute is the frontier between the Church and the world. But within the Church herself an equally clear distinction is drawn between the large number of lukewarm, easygoing Christians, whose profession of faith is hardly more than nominal, and the 'faithful remnant' of true believers, by whom the savour of the divine society is preserved,—a minority, as it were, within a minority. When every account has been taken of the fluctuations in the Church's fortunes through the course of the ages, we delude ourselves if we imagine that there can ever be a wide variation from this norm. There has never been anything approaching a world-wide conversion of the Gentiles, and there are no signs that such a thing may occur in the future. Indeed, at the present time the Church seems to be entering once again upon the way of suffering, persecution and judgment which has been, throughout her history, the means of her purification and the prelude of her successive regenerations.

'Salvation lies at the end of history and not in some realm of eternity beyond history.'² In all the circumstances of the world God is working out His saving purposes. All history is under His sovereign direction; and it is the special task of the Church to discern and to declare His

¹W. J. Phythian-Adams, *The Fulness of Israel*, p. 199.

²R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, p. 188.

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judgment in the courses of the world, that men may acknowledge their sins and turn to Him in repentance. God's judgment will indeed be consummated in the last day, but its operation belongs to every moment of the time, as it is written, 'The works of the Lord are done in judgment from the beginning.'¹

Nowhere in the Scriptures is this theme developed with such power as in the Apocalypse; and for this reason alone there is, perhaps, no book in the Bible so urgently relevant to our needs at the present time. In the tremendous procession of its visions we are shown that evil brings its own retribution, that all disaster and adversity are the consequence of the fearful disorder in the world which we call sin, and that, although in the complexity of human life and circumstance it is rarely possible to trace a direct sequence of cause and effect, yet there is no escape from the certainty of judgment. As the book proceeds, the nature of the conflict between good and evil is displayed with more ruthless clarity and with a gathering intensity of dramatic action. We see that sin has a deadly fertility. It is cumulative and progressive. The mystery of iniquity must be fulfilled to the uttermost before there can be any true regeneration. It is not until Babylon has been utterly destroyed that the new heaven and the new earth can come amongst men and the glory of the new Jerusalem be revealed.

The more carefully we study the Scriptures, the more profound are the depths of meaning revealed. In the prophetic writings, and supremely in our Lord's teaching, the greatest spiritual truths are frequently conveyed, not by direct statement, but by analogy and symbol. For example, many of the feminine characters in Scripture are to be understood as types of the Christian Church. Indeed,

¹Ecclus. xvi. 26.

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whenever the Bible speaks of the nature of woman, of marriage and of the bearing of children, some spiritual meaning of this kind is usually to be discerned; according to the analogy between the wedded love of man and woman, and the union of Christ with the Church, His elect bride.

Again, in the Psalms and in the Gospels we frequently find the operations of the Holy Spirit represented under the figure of water, and more especially of water in movement—of running streams, of springs and fountains, of the rain by which the land is refreshed, and so forth; and this is but one of the many symbols under which His presence in the world and His manifold gifts are described or alluded to.

Or consider the word 'temple' which our Lord uses as a symbol of His own humanity, and which is elsewhere employed as a figure of the Christian Church and, in other places, as representing the individual Christian. Yet in no case is the one interpretation exclusive; with a difference of emphasis the triple meaning is always to be discerned. What is said primarily of Christ or of the Church or of the individual believer is, in some sense, fulfilled in each. This is abundantly illustrated in the visions of the Apocalypse; and its recognition as a principle of interpretation is essential to an understanding of the book's teaching.

It is tempting, but it is perhaps unnecessary, to say more by way of introduction to the notes which follow. The text printed here is that of the Revised Version. In a good many passages it is more accurate than that of the Authorised, though in some cases accuracy is obtained at the expense of the incomparable music and unsurpassed dignity of the older translation.

The writer gives his warm thanks to the Rev. G. P. H. Pawson, who has read these notes in manuscript and made wise suggestions and criticisms.

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XI. 15, 17, 18; XII. 10-12; XV. 3, 4;
XIX. 1, 2, 5, 6.

I

THE PROLOGUE AND THE VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

I

1 *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to shew unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by*
2 *his angel unto his servant John; who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even*
3 *of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

4 *John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from him which is and which was and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are*
5 *before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loveth us, and*
6 *loosed us from our sins by his blood; and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever.*
7 *Amen. Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they which pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn over him. Even so, Amen.*

8 *I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty.*

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In our English Bibles the book which we are to study is entitled 'The Revelation of St. John the Divine'. The full and proper title is given in the opening verse: 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to shew unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.' No book in the Scriptures opens in such solemn terms; none makes so uncompromising a statement of its own direct inspiration.

It is the revelation, 'not of John, but of Christ,' as one ancient commentator expresses it. The part of John is to bear 'witness of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ'. And therefore he pronounces a benediction upon all who shall study and keep its teaching; whilst, in the last verses of the book, we shall find him invoking a doom upon anyone who shall presume to tamper with it or to water down the fulness of its message.

This revelation of things beyond the understanding of man, this unfolding of the mysteries of God's plan and purpose for the world, is 'sent and signified' to St. John by an angel; and the apostle, obedient to the heavenly visitation, sets himself to record the things that he has been allowed to see.

'All', says Isaac Williams, 'is of the beautiful order and harmony which is in heaven; which God gave unto Christ, and Christ to his angel: his angel to John, and John to the Churches. It is apostolic, and not only that, but also angelic and evangelic.'¹

We may, indeed, speak of the Apocalypse as an angelic Gospel. It tells us more of the ministry of the angels than any other book in the Bible. We hear the angelic choirs chanting their praises round the throne of God in heaven. In vision after vision we see the angels going forth as

¹*The Apocalypse*, p. 2.

heralds of the divine judgment and ministers of God's will. They are His messengers and His agents; and, as Newman says, whenever we look abroad, we should be reminded of these most gracious and holy beings, the servants of the Most High. 'Every breath of air and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God in heaven.'

It is clear that St. John was writing to seven actual churches in Asia Minor; and it may be taken as equally certain that, in the epistles to the seven churches which follow in chapters II and III, the warnings and exhortations refer to the actual conditions, at that time, in each one of them. But it is no less sure that the messages and all that follow are addressed, through these seven Christian communities, to all the churches then in the world, and thence to the whole Catholic Church in every age of its history. For, throughout the Apocalypse, numbers are to be treated as symbols; and 7 is the sacred number of Scripture, signifying completeness, and hence, in the spiritual sense, the mystery of redemption. Especially it symbolises the Catholic Church; for it is made up of 3, the number of divinity (as of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity), and 4 which signifies mankind or creation in general (as of the four elements, the four winds which blow upon the earth and the four rivers by which, in the Genesis narrative, the whole world is watered).

To the seven churches St. John imparts a benediction of grace and peace in the name of the Blessed Trinity,—of the Father 'which is and which was and which is to come'; of the Holy Spirit personalised in the sevenfold gifts of His indwelling presence; and of the Son, the faithful witness and mirror of the Godhead in His earthly life, the conqueror of all the powers of death and hell by His resurrec-

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tion, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in His reign in heaven and in His Church on earth. Note how 3, the number of divinity, recurs in these triple clauses: 'Unto him (1) that loveth us, (2) and loosed us from our sins by his blood, (3) and he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

The mention of clouds in the Apocalypse is always associated with the presence of Jesus Christ and with the thought of His second coming to judge the world. On that day 'every eye shall see him'—not only His faithful followers and witnesses, but those also 'which pierced him', all those who in careless and sinful living have crucified the Son of Man afresh. 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn.'¹

St. John concludes his introductory salutation with a reminder that he is not speaking to his hearers by his own authority, but that he is to bear record of the word of the eternal God and to disclose mysteries revealed directly to him by the angel of the Lord. 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty.'

I

- 9 *I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word*
10 *of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a great voice,*
11 *as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto*

¹Zech. xii. 10.

Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and
 12 *unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice which*
spake with me. And having turned I saw seven golden
 13 *candlesticks; and in the midst of the candlesticks one*
like unto a son of man, clothed with a garment down
to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden
 14 *girdle. And his head and his hair were white as white*
wool, white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of
 15 *fire; and his feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had*
been refined in a furnace; and his voice as the voice of
 16 *many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars:*
and out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged
sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in
 17 *his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as*
one dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying,
 18 *Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living*
one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for ever-
 19 *more, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write*
therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things
which are, and the things which shall come to pass here-
 20 *after; the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest*
in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.
The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:
and the seven candlesticks are seven churches.

With careful precision as to the time and place, the apostle describes the circumstances under which the visions that he is to unfold were granted to him. Of a sudden he is caught up in an ecstasy of the spirit; it is the voice of the Eternal God that speaks with him, and he is bidden to record the things that he is to see and to make them known to the seven churches which are in Asia.

'And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.' He did not look forward, but turned to look behind him. It is

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a valuable lesson to all who would study the Apocalypse. We are not to look forward into the future, seeking to interpret these visions as predictions of coming events; rather, we are to turn and fix our eyes upon Him Who is speaking. 'And when they had lift up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.'¹ Only in contemplating the symbols of His presence, only in humble attendance upon His words—not, certainly, by the exercise of our own petty ingenuity—may we hope to learn what He would teach us in these mysteries of His revelation.

'And having turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks,' symbolising, as our Lord explains later, the seven churches which, in turn, represent the universal Church of all the ages. The Son of Man is seen 'in the midst' of His Church, as dwelling within her and sharing in her life which is also His own.

It is to be observed that the vision was of 'one like unto a son of man'; St. John does not say that he beheld our Lord in person. It is the unanimous opinion of theologians that, since His ascension, Christ has scarcely ever appeared in His actual Person. St. John of the Cross tells us that, when He reveals Himself, He habitually does so 'by the instrumentality of the good angel'.²

The majesty of His presence is revealed in a series of wonderful figures. He is clothed with the alb of priesthood and He wears the golden girdle of royalty. The shining whiteness of perfect holiness and purity invests Him. His eyes are 'as a flame of fire'; as it is written, 'The eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun'.³ His feet, perhaps symbolising His sacred humanity as He walked on earth, are as fine brass purified in the fire; for

¹Matthew xvii. 8.

²*Dark Night of the Soul*, II. 23. vii.

³Ecclus. xxiii. 19.

He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. His voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd which the sheep know and follow, is as the sound of many waters,—those living waters of the Spirit which shall become in him who receives them ‘a well of water springing up unto eternal life’¹. He holds in His right hand the seven stars representing the angels of the seven churches,—not their guardian angels, but angelic figures, as it were person-alising the churches. Out of His mouth goes forth ‘a sharp two-edged sword’. The sword may symbolise the two divine attributes of mercy and judgment,—perfect love and perfect justice; but another interpretation, perhaps a better one, is that it represents the word of God as revealed in the Old Testament and the New,—as it is written, ‘take the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God’.² Finally, His countenance, shining ‘as the sun in his strength’, reminds us that the world without Him is lost in darkness, lacking its true light.

No man may see God and live. There had been a time when the beloved disciple had leant his head upon the breast of Jesus in the calm and trusting intimacy of a perfect friendship; but now, in the presence of this same Jesus, glorified in His perfect Godhead and enthroned in the majesty of heaven, St. John is stricken to the ground as one dead. But the right hand that had raised Peter when he was sinking in the waves, is stretched out to John; and the familiar assurance is heard again, ‘Fear not.’ In His kingly power our Lord takes up the refrain,—‘I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.’

‘Because I live, ye shall live also.’ It is the full glory of the Christian promise; for with Him are the issues of life and death.

¹John iv. 14.

²Eph. vi. 17.

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Therefore it is in ratification of that promise that the apostle is bidden to record the mysteries to be revealed to him. For they will show how matters stand for ever between God and man and how the things which are and the things which shall be hereafter are held together in a single divine order.

II

THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The seven letters which occupy chapters II and III are addressed to seven actual Christian communities in Asia Minor. But there were other churches in Asia at this time,—at Magnesia, Tralles, and other places, and the terms of the letters (e.g. the phrase repeated in each one, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches') and the use of the symbolic number 7 shew that the messages are intended for the admonition of the Catholic Church as a whole and are to be received as such, independently of time and place.

Indeed, such is the wealth and profundity of their teaching that these seven letters, as Isaac Williams puts it, 'are to the churches of all time what the parables of the Gospel are to individuals; a glass in which they may detect themselves and the judgment of God.' They deal with every variety of circumstance and trial to which the Church has been exposed through the centuries. They differ from anything else in Scripture in that they record words spoken by our Lord after His ascent into heaven,—words, therefore, which have for His Church a special and most solemn authority. Finally, let it be noted that although it is to the churches that the letters are directed, it is the individual Christian who is primarily addressed. '*He* that hath an ear, let *him* hear what the Spirit saith to the churches'; and in each case the promise is 'to *him* that overcometh'. We must never read these letters in any impersonal sense; it is

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to each one of us, as members of the universal Church, that our Lord speaks in reproof, warning or encouragement.

The structure of each letter is the same, except that in the first three the phrase 'He that hath an ear . . .' precedes the phrase 'To him that overcometh . . .'; in the last four the order of the two phrases is reversed. In so orderly a book as the Apocalypse no structural difference of this kind is to be dismissed as insignificant. Some distinction is perhaps to be drawn between the teaching of the first three letters and that of the last four. Milligan suggests that the former refer especially to the things of the spirit, to each church in its relation to God; whereas the latter are concerned primarily with the Church in its relation with the world.

Each letter is addressed 'to the angel of the church in . . .'. This, it would appear, does not mean the guardian angel; it is rather a symbolic way of personalising each church. The 'angel of the church' denotes that church in action, its condition and activity as seen by God,—as contrasted with its condition and activity in its own estimation.

To St. John the distinction or boundary between the Church and the world is a clear and definite one; but at the same time he shews us how in each age the Church has been tempted to compromise with the world and to pretend that the frontier between them does not matter or even does not exist. And within the Church itself he seems to be aware of a permanent distinction between the minority of faithful witnesses to Christ and the larger number of Christians whose religion is of a tepid, conventional kind and in whose lives the gifts of the Holy Spirit fail, in varying degrees, to bear fruit.

Nevertheless, in the divine order which informs the

whole of creation, the frontier between the Church and the world is clear and absolute. There are few Christian writings, Scriptural or otherwise, in which the glory of the Church's mission, the intimacy of her union with her Founder and the wonder of the spiritual gifts bestowed upon her, are set forth with such magnificent confidence. In the later visions she is described with a wealth of imagery that seems, at a superficial glance, almost extravagant. And yet, likewise, no book exposes more fiercely the degradation and hypocrisy, the false 'broad-mindedness' and the ready subservience to vested interests in the world by which her history has been soiled through the centuries.

We are apt to be bewildered and dismayed by this paradox. But St. John teaches us that there is no real contradiction; the two things are complementary aspects of the truth about the Church's nature. It may be that nowadays our temptation is to despair of the Church, of her ineffectiveness in witness and her skill in compromise, of her enormous futility in the face of the world's needs. But there are not two Churches, a true and a false, a divine and a human. The Church is a single society. It is her tragedy that sin has so grievously weakened her power of witness in the world. But her glory remains and will always remain; she is, in very truth, the elect Bride of Christ, the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven for the regeneration of mankind.

No great learning or critical skill is needed in the interpretation of the letters themselves. Much of the imagery comes from Old Testament sources. The figures under which our Lord reveals Himself at the beginning of each letter are taken from the vision of His appearance to the seer in chapter I, and His several attributes are directly related to the circumstances of the accompanying message.

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His presence is central and dominant throughout. Always He is in the midst of His Church, her Saviour and Judge, her Guide and Counsellor, her Light and her Life.

II

- 1 *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write;*
These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in
his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven
2 *golden candlesticks: I know thy works, and thy toil*
and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men,
and didst try them which call themselves apostles, and
3 *they are not, and didst find them false; and thou hast*
patience and didst bear for my name's sake, and hast
4 *not grown weary. But I have this against thee, that*
5 *thou didst leave thy first love. Remember therefore*
from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the
first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy
6 *candlestick out of its place, except thou repent. But*
this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nico-
7 *laitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him*
hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that
overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of
life, which is in the Paradise of God.

It is well to reduce commentary on the letters to a minimum. We shall merely insert a few general observations and, here and there, suggest interpretations of some of the figures and symbols employed.

Our Lord finds much to commend in the church at Ephesus; but there has been a falling away from that fervour and joy in good works which are the marks of true conversion. Moreover, the permanent note of penitence is lacking in their lives,—a grave fault frustrating the development of an ordered Christian life.

Much discussion has centred on the beliefs and practices of the Nicolaitans. They were evidently an heretical and dissident sect, whose presence had caused division within the Christian community; and it is sufficient for us to note that a true love of Christ must always imply a hatred of false doctrine.

II

- 8 *And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write;*
These things saith the first and the last, which was
 9 *dead, and lived again: I know thy tribulation, and thy*
poverty (but thou art rich), and the blasphemy of them
which say they are Jews, and they are not, but are a
 10 *synagogue of Satan. Fear not the things which thou art*
about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some
of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall
have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death,
 11 *and I will give thee the crown of life. He that hath an*
ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.
He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second
death.

A message of encouragement to a valiant community, hard pressed by persecution and perhaps tempted sometimes to wonder whether it is worth while continuing the struggle. 'Fear not,' comes the confident assurance; 'be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life.'

As applied to the world, 10 represents totality or completeness. But, in the spiritual sense, it symbolises obedience to God's law, as given in the ten commandments. Hence the phrase 'ye shall have tribulation ten days' suggests that their sufferings are the necessary price of faithfulness to Christ in the world.

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Of the 'second death' Bede observes that 'he who shall have remained faithful to the death of the flesh, will not fear the death of the soul'.

II

- 12 *And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write;*
13 *These things saith he that hath the sharp two-edged sword: I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's throne is: and thou holdest fast my name, and didst not deny my faith, even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you,*
14 *where Satan dwelleth. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there some that hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in*
15 *like manner. Repent therefore; or else I come to thee quickly, and I will make war against them with the*
16 *sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth but he that receiveth it.*

In a city of appalling wickedness, described as the very capital of Satan's Kingdom, the Christian community has witnessed stedfastly for the faith. But some of its members have fallen into idolatry, rendering to Caesar the things that are God's and taking the easy way of compromise.

Throughout the Apocalypse, as in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, fornication symbolises false and corrupted religion, spiritual faithlessness, the betrayal of the mystical bond between Christ and His

Church. We shall see this idea developed fully in the great contrast of the later visions between Jerusalem and Babylon, the Bride and the Harlot.

The 'hidden manna' may signify the Blessed Sacrament, and the 'white stone' the regenerative graces of Holy Baptism, with a further allusion to Christ himself.¹

'And upon the stone a new name',—that is, a new *nature*; the word 'name' has this sense throughout the book. The thought is the same as that of St. Paul,—'Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away.'² And the secret communications of grace and love between God and the consecrated soul are known only to those who receive them. It is beyond the resources of language to describe them or to share them with others.

II

18 *And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write;*

These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto burnished brass: I know thy works, and thy love and faith and ministry and patience, and that thy last works are more than the first. But I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she should repent; and she willeth not to repent of her fornication. Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto each one of you according to your works. But to you I say, to the

¹cf. Matthew xxi. 42.

²2 Corinthians v. 17.

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rest that are in Thyatira, as many as have not this teaching, which know not the deep things of Satan, as
25 *they say; I cast upon you none other burden. Howbeit*
26 *that which ye have, hold fast till I come. And he that*
overcometh, and he that keepeth my works unto the
27 *end, to him will I give authority over the nations: and*
he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of
the potter are broken to shivers; as I also have received
28 *of my Father: and I will give him the morning star.*
29 *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith*
to the churches.

At Thyatira, as contrasted with Ephesus, there has been steady progress in good works; faith and charity have been strengthened and 'the last works' are more than the first.

Nevertheless, all is not well. False doctrine, represented under the figures of fornication and adultery and personalised in the symbol of 'the woman Jezebel which calleth herself a prophetess', has caused many defections.

In v. 24 we have reference to 'the rest' or remnant,—those who have remained faithful. Our Lord encourages them to steady perseverance. To him that overcometh it is promised that he shall, in very truth, reign with Christ. 'He rules over the nations by the power of his cross; and here it seems to be indicated that by the cross his martyr shall do the same.'

The morning star is Christ Himself, the light of the world; as we shall hear Him say, 'I am . . . the bright, the morning star.'¹

III

- 1 *And to the angel of the church in Sardis write;*
These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of
God, and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou

¹xxii. 16.

2 *hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead. Be
 thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain,
 which were ready to die: for I have found no works of*
 3 *thine fulfilled before my God. Remember therefore how
 thou hast received and didst hear; and keep it, and
 repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come
 as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will*
 4 *come upon thee. But thou hast a few names in Sardis
 which did not defile their garments: and they shall*
 5 *walk with me in white; for they are worthy. He that
 overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments;
 and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of
 life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and*
 6 *before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear
 what the Spirit saith to the churches.*

‘Thou hast a name that thou livest, and thou art dead’;
 there is the fearful contradiction between the reputation
 enjoyed by this church among other communities and its
 true condition before God. There is much bustling out-
 ward activity, but all is hollow and unreal; spiritually, it
 is in a state of death. ‘The life of the body is the soul,’ says
 St. Augustine; ‘and as the body without the soul is dead,
 so is the soul dead without God.’

‘Stablish the things that remain.’ You have squan-
 dered the treasures of the faith beyond immediate re-
 covery. You have so weakened and watered down the
 life-giving truths of the Gospel that they have almost lost
 their savour. It is vain for you to think that you can, in a
 moment, repair the damage and restore the fulness of
 Christian teaching and living. The way of regeneration
 will be long and arduous; your immediate task must
 be, in deepest penitence, to ‘stablish the things that
 remain’, to endure a time of spiritual poverty. Not yet

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can you expect to enjoy the enrichments of a full and balanced Catholic life.

Our Lord's reproof is stern and uncompromising. But even in Sardis there is a faithful remnant, a nucleus of true believers,—'a few names.'

'He said not "a few", but "a few names",' comments Bede. 'For "He calleth His own sheep by name," who knew Moses by name and who writes the names of His saints in heaven.'

There is great splendour in the promise 'to him that overcometh'; recalling the words of the prophet, 'A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord. . . . And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.'¹ And again, in our Lord's own words, 'Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.'²

III

7 *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write;*

These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and none shall shut, and that shutteth, and none openeth: I know thy works (behold, I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut), that thou hast a little power, and
9 *didst keep my word, and didst not deny my name. Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet,*
10 *and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*

¹Malachi iii. 16, 17.

²Luke x. 20.

11 *I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that*
 12 *no one take thy crown. He that overcometh, I will*
make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he
shall go out thence no more: and I will write upon him
the name of my God, and the name of the city of my
God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of
 13 *heaven from my God, and mine own new name. He*
that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to
the churches.

This church is humble and obscure. There has been no spectacular achievement and no opportunities for the display of heroism. Yet 'thou hast a little power and didst keep my word and didst not deny my name'. That is all, and it is enough; to the Christians of Philadelphia our Lord speaks with special love and gentleness. They will be led and guided and preserved from temptation in their quiet progress in the ways of sanctity.

It seems clear that the 'key of David' must be the same as the 'keys of death and of Hades' to which Christ had laid claim in the opening vision of chapter I. Here, the imagery takes up the words of Isaiah,—'And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open.'¹ We are reminded of the all-powerful efficacy of Christ's redemptive sacrifice upon the cross.

The concluding promise belongs as much to the present as the future and sets forth the fulfilment of baptismal regeneration; wherein the Christian is made a member of Christ ('I will write upon him mine own new name'), a child of God ('I will write upon him the name of my God') and an inheritor of the Kingdom of heaven ('and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem').

¹Isaiah xxii. 22.

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III

14 *And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write;
These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true*
15 *witness, the beginning of the creation of God: I know*
thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would
16 *thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art luke-*
warm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of
17 *my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have*
gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest
not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and
18 *poor and blind and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me*
gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and
white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and
that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest;
and eyesalve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.
19 *As many as I love, I reprove and chasten: be zealous*
20 *therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and*
knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I
will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with
21 *me. He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down*
with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat
22 *down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an*
ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches.

Other churches have been reprov'd in varying degrees of severity; but the condition of the church at Laodicea seems to provoke something more than our Lord's righteous anger. There is a note almost of contempt and disgust in His condemnation. This 'lukewarmness',—the easygoing, conventional religion, bland and self-satisfied, ostentatious yet utterly shallow (how well it satisfies most of us!)—is more offensive to our Lord than any other kind of faithlessness. Its twin foundations are self-deception and self-righteousness.

Christ can restore all things. But His strength and grace must be purchased; they are not bestowed gratuitously or unconditionally. 'To the lukewarm', says Isaac Williams, 'Christ enters not. He knocks; but there must be, within, one to hear His voice and open the door. Something must be done on our part; if we constrain Him not to abide, He will depart.'

In vv. 19-21 the whole course of the spiritual life is traced for us, as in the stages of a pilgrimage. We have, in succession, the Way of Purgation, the Way of Illumination and the Way of Union.

It is noteworthy that neither at Sardis nor at Laodicea—the two churches which incur our Lord's heaviest condemnation,—is there any mention of heresy or internal strife or of the activity of Satan. In both these churches Satan's work is done and completed,—he can afford to leave them undisturbed.

We cannot expect to draw out to the full the hidden meaning of every symbol used in the Apocalypse; and, as Archbishop Benson said, it does not matter very much if we fail to do so. Indeed, it is probably a mistake to seek to force an interpretation upon every detail of St. John's imagery. But, as we come to know the book better, we shall continually find that new depths of meaning are revealed and we shall see that no detail of its symbolism is without significance.

'As in mines of gold,' writes St. John Chrysostom, 'anyone who is skilled in such matters could not bear to overlook even the slightest vein, inasmuch as it is capable of yielding great riches; so, in like manner, in the divine scriptures we cannot pass over one jot or one tittle without loss; but it is necessary throughout to investigate all things. For all these things are spoken by the Holy Spirit; nor is there in them anything that is superfluous.'¹

¹*In Joann. Hom. xxxvi.*

III

THE VISION OF HEAVEN AND THE ADORATION OF THE LAMB

Taken together, chapters IV and V form the third of the seven sections into which the Apocalypse is divided.

The divine sovereignty extends over all creation; and all created things, in their due rank and estate, acknowledge that sovereignty and bear witness to it. Hence, as has been said, the whole order of creation is a manifestation of God's love as a great play, with the universe as its scenery. Or again, to quote St. John of the Cross:

'All God's creatures have a certain correspondence with God, whereby each, by a voice peculiar to itself, proclaims what there is of God in itself, so as to form a concert of sublimest melody, transcending all harmonies.'¹

This chorus of adoration is the permanent music of the divine order, never silent, ranging over an infinite variety of expression and emphasis. It is, we must believe, the expression of an accord between the Creator and that which He has made,—a fulfilment, uninterrupted and complete, of the divine intention. It unites earth with heaven, man with the angels, all with God. In the two chapters that we are now to consider, the seer is carried in spirit to the midst of the heavenly realm. He is permitted to hear the anthems of praise offered to the Sovereign Creator by the whole order of created being; and the vision culminates (in chapter V) in the music of what

¹*The Spiritual Canticle, 2nd Redaction, xiv-xv, 25.*

may be called the High Mass of heaven. It is in the sacrifice of the Mass that man stands before the altar of God as the representative, the mouthpiece, of all living creatures and all inanimate things that minister to his needs.

God the Creator; Christ the Redeemer; Man the Created and Redeemed. So might this wonderful vision be entitled. To read and to meditate upon these two chapters is to be taken upon a great journey and to be shown a glimpse of Paradise.

IV

- 1 *After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will shew thee the things which must come*
- 2 *to pass hereafter. Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne; and he that sat was to look upon*
- 3 *like a jasper stone and a sardius: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, like an emerald to look*
- 4 *upon. And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting, arrayed in white garments; and on their*
- 5 *heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceed lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which*
- 6 *are the seven Spirits of God; and before the throne, as it were a glassy sea like unto crystal; and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, four living*
- 7 *creatures full of eyes before and behind. And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face as of a man,*
- 8 *and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, having each one of them six*

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wings, are full of eyes round about and within: and they have no rest day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, which was and which is
9 *and which is to come. And when the living creatures shall give glory and honour and thanks to him that sitteth on the throne, to him that liveth for ever and*
10 *ever, the four and twenty elders shall fall down before him that sitteth on the throne, and shall worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and shall cast their crowns*
11 *before the throne, saying, Worthy art thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honour and the power: for thou didst create all things, and because of thy will they were, and were created.*

It may be helpful to append one or two notes about the interpretation of the symbols employed. But the vision stands in no need of detailed commentary.

By the green jasper, mercy is signified; by the red sardius, justice. Infinite mercy and perfect justice, as expressed in the two Names, Yahveh and Elohim. The rainbow, encircling the throne of God's majesty and with the emerald green mystically predominating, gives further assurance of the divine covenant of mercy; as it is written, 'Mercy shall be built up for ever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens.'¹

'And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones: and upon the thrones I saw four and twenty elders sitting.' 12 is the number signifying election, here multiplied by 2 to express emphasis or fulfilment. We think of the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles,— 'ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.'² The four and twenty elders thus represent the chosen and consecrated people of the old and the new Israel. They wear

¹Psalms lxxxix. 2.

²John xv. 16.

the albs of priesthood and crowns of royalty; for 'he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father'.¹

As the rainbow round about the throne symbolises the divine mercy, so the 'glassy sea like unto crystal' represents God's absolute justice, crystal-clear in its integrity and purity, perfect in equity like the level expanse of a calm sea.

By many of the ancient commentators from St. Irenaeus onwards the four living creatures are associated with the four evangelists and hence, in a wider sense, with all those who have been brought to salvation by the light of the Christian Gospel. 4, in the symbolism of numbers, represents mankind; and it is therefore in accordance with Catholic tradition to consider the four living creatures as representative of the whole company of those sanctified in Christ,—mankind redeemed.

In the next chapter we are told that the seven eyes of the Lamb signify the seven Spirits of God.² Hence, we may take the words 'full of eyes before and behind' as referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit by which the heart of man is sanctified and enlightened. As to the outward appearance of the living creatures, we may perhaps, amongst many interpretations, accept the explanation suggested by Milligan.

'Taking the "living creatures" together in all their parts,' he writes, 'they are thus an emblem of man, associated on the one hand with the material creation, on the other with the various tribes of animals by which it is inhabited, but all redeemed, transfigured, perfected, delivered from the bondage of corruption and brought into "the liberty of the glory of the children of God"'.³

The mystical significance of the six wings is shown in

¹i. 6.

²v. 6.

³*The Book of Revelation*, p. 71.

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Isaiah VI. 2—‘with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly,’—symbolising respectively humility, penitence and adoration. The living creatures are ‘full of eyes round about and within’ as well as ‘before and behind’, as shewing the intimate indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the consecrated soul as well as His outward guidance of thought and action.

We may note how the number 3, the mystic number of divinity, permeates this chapter. God’s judgments are heard in ‘lightnings and voices and thunders’. The living creatures ascribe ‘glory and honour and thanks’ to Him ‘which was and which is and which is to come’. And whilst they chant the anthem of the *Tersanctus*, the four and twenty elders ‘shall fall down before him . . . and shall worship him . . . and shall cast their crowns before the throne’, acknowledging that to Him alone belong ‘the glory and the honour and the power’.

V

1 *And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close*
2 *sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the*
3 *book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no one in the heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was*
4 *able to open the book, or to look thereon. And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the*
5 *book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open*
6 *the book and the seven seals thereof. And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven*

eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth
 7 into all the earth. And he came, and he taketh it out of
 8 the right hand of him that sat on the throne. And when
 he had taken the book, the four living creatures and
 the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb,
 having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of in-
 9 cense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they
 sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the
 book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain,
 and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of
 10 every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and
 madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests;
 11 and they reign upon the earth. And I saw, and I heard
 a voice of many angels round about the throne and the
 living creatures and the elders; and the number of them
 was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of
 12 thousands; saying with a great voice, Worthy is the
 Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and
 riches, and wisdom, and might, and honour, and glory,
 13 and blessing. And every created thing which is in the
 heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and on
 the sea, and all things that are in them, heard I saying,
 Unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the
 Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory,
 14 and the dominion, for ever and ever. And the four liv-
 ing creatures said, Amen. And the elders fell down and
 worshipped.

The book 'written within and on the back' and sealed
 with seven seals is the book of God's purpose for the
 world—the whole Gospel of salvation. No man can open
 it or even look upon it, for the mysteries of the divine
 providence transcend human understanding, and man-
 kind, in the corruption of sin, is incapable of saving him-

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self. 'And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed.'¹

But in Christ are all the treasures of the divine wisdom; to Him it is given to reveal 'things hidden from the foundation of the world'. He alone can open the sealed book. By Him the divine plan for the world's salvation is made known to man, and it is seen that the unfolding of the mystery is nothing else than the revelation of His own Person and of the redemptive mission that He has come to accomplish. For His earthly life is no isolated episode, complete in itself; in His Godhead He reigns eternally in heaven, but He lives and reigns also in His mystical body, the Church of all the ages. And to all His faithful followers He declares, as He had declared to His chosen disciples, 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom.'

'And I saw . . . a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes.' The horn symbolises power and authority; and the seven horns therefore represent the plenitude of Christ's kingship, as the seven eyes ('which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth') signify the fulness of His divinity and the perfection of His wisdom.

There is an unexampled splendour in the passage that follows. Van Eyck made this vision the subject of one of his greatest pictures. But, in truth, any attempt to visualise the scene or to represent it pictorially must fail to satisfy us. All is symbolic, not pictorial. It is a sublime representation of the heavenly counterpart of the Mass,—the ever-continued pleading of the sacrifice of Calvary before the throne of God, the gathering-up of the worship of the Church in a timeless action of adoration and thanksgiving.

The anthem sung by the multitude of the redeemed,

¹Isaiah xxix. 11.

represented by the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures, is a 'new song', wholly different from the song of chapter IV. The theme is not the creation of the world, but its redemption in the blood of the Lamb, whereby all creation is renewed and man is raised to a new stature. The company of the angels joins in the concert of worship and thanksgiving. And finally, the whole order of material creation adds its testimony of praise in a heavenly music which our ears are too dull to hear, though we must believe that its strains are unceasing. All things, in their due order, witness to the glory of God; 'all thy works shall praise thee, O Lord.'¹ Thus the vision closes with all the company of heaven and the realm of created being kneeling before the holy Lamb of God; 'that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.'²

¹Psalm cxlv. 10.

²Philippians ii. 10, 11.

IV

THE PROVIDENCE AND JUDGMENTS OF GOD IN HISTORY

We are now on the threshold of the great central section of the book which occupies thirteen of its twenty-two chapters and which itself falls into seven clearly defined divisions. The general disposition is as follows:

- (1) The Seven Seals (VI. 1–VIII. 6).
- (2) The Seven Trumpets (VIII. 7–XI. 19).
- (3) The Woman and the Dragon (XII).
- (4) The Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Land (XIII).
- (5) The Lamb on Mount Zion and the Preparation of the Harvest (XIV).
- (6) The Seven Golden Bowls (XV–XVI).
- (7) The Judgment of Babylon (XVII–XVIII).

We must in no sense regard the episodes and judgments described in these visions as following one after another in order of time. We shall be led still more widely astray if we think of them as a series of forecasts. To try to link them up with this or that event in history, this or that epoch, this or that historical personage or nation would seem a hopeless misunderstanding of the book's teaching and purpose.

The visions are rather to be regarded as a series of carefully related pictures or as the successive scenes of a pageant in which the whole drama of man's life in this

world is displayed in its relation to God's transcendent purposes for the fulfilment of His kingdom. We are to be shown how God's sovereign will is being worked out in the courses of the world, how all things are subject to His providence and how, in the age-long struggle between good and evil of which this world is the arena, the ultimate triumph belongs to good.

Thus, although the visions are symbolic in form and, in a sense, independent of time, the idea of time cannot be eliminated from their interpretation. They display the operation of God's laws and judgments within the realm of history. They show us how everything that happens is instrumental to God's ultimate purpose for the salvation of the world.

By his own free choice man may collaborate with the purposes of God or, by his evil actions, oppose them. But the divine providence cannot be frustrated or denied. Under God's law, which is sovereign over all, evil brings its own retribution. Wrongdoing leads inevitably to disaster; and the disaster, when it comes, is a punishment inherent in the offence, not something added to it. It expresses the judgment and condemnation of God, summoning men to realise what they (or their fathers) have done. It is a moral judgment, making itself felt in the realm of history and events, that man may recognise the hand of God and turn to Him in penitence and trust.

Now it is precisely in this sense that the visions of the Apocalypse,—and more particularly the three great series of the Seals, the Trumpets and the Bowls,—do deal with historical events and with the unfolding of the general historical process. They declare the judgments of God, as those judgments are to be discerned in the realm of history. They interpret history in the light of eternity. They reiterate, with a wide variety of symbol and emphasis, the

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primary truth that man's final destiny can never be consummated in this world. They shew us that evil is, by its very nature, progressive and cumulative, and that, if man forgets God or defies Him and thus denies his own nature, the mystery of iniquity must work itself out to the full,—to the uttermost limits of catastrophe and despair. 'Good men who do not understand the depth of human sinfulness always imagine that sin will reduce itself to an absurdity and allow the strategy of the Kingdom a clear field. Unfortunately there is nothing in human history to substantiate this hope.'¹ And yet, to evil belongs no final triumph. All is within the framework of God's ultimate purpose for the world's salvation.

(I) THE SEVEN SEALS

The visions revealed in the opening of the Seven Seals form a single dramatic whole, divided, as it were, into seven acts; and between the sixth seal and the seventh, there are two interludes. This structural arrangement, as we shall see, is exactly paralleled in the visions heralded by the Seven Trumpets; and we shall note also how close is the correspondence of thought and symbol between the two series. The distinction between them is evident. They do not describe successive manifestations of God's actions and judgments, the Trumpets following in time after the Seals. On the contrary, they shew the operation of His providence under two different aspects, the first rather more general than the second. Each series is, so to say, complete in itself. Each relates to the whole Christian age from the Incarnation to the end of time. Each shows how the redemptive purposes of God are being worked out in the courses of the world and in the ministry and witness of

¹R. Niebuhr, *Beyond Tragedy*, p. 185.

the Catholic Church. Each overlaps the other. That is the essential point, and it will become clearer as we proceed.

It may be remarked that the Seven Seals, like the Seven Trumpets, fall into two groups, of four and three respectively. In the first group we are concerned with the human or worldly aspect of the mysteries revealed; in the second we are raised to the level of eternity and the action moves with greater majesty and intensity.

The opening of the Seven Seals,—the opening of the book of God's purpose for mankind by Him who is alone able to open it,—shews the entry of the Gospel into the realm of history. Richard of St. Victor says that the Seals relate to the revelation of the mystery of the Kingdom, whereas the Trumpets deal with the proclamation of the mystery to the world.¹ Thus, while the Trumpets, as we shall see, refer to the actual history of the Church, the Seals display, in more general terms, the nature of the inevitable conflict or tension between the Church and the world,—a world largely indifferent to the Church's saving mission and proudly convinced of its own self-sufficiency. For the life of the Church is a mystical continuation of the earthly life of Christ. In every age Christ is crucified afresh; 'and this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.'²

The following table shews the sequence of the seven visions of the Seals:

- i. The white horse (VI. 1, 2).
- ii. The red horse (VI. 3, 4).
- iii. The black horse (VI. 5, 6).
- iv. The pale horse (VI. 7, 8).

¹*In Apoc. Joannis*, vii, 10; Migne, *P.L.* cxcvi, 886.

²John iii. 19.

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- v. The prayer of the martyrs (VI. 9-11).
- vi. The confusion of the world's wickedness (VI. 12-17).
 - Interlude 1. The sealing of the 144,000 (VII. 1-8).
 - Interlude 2. The white-robed multitude (VII. 9-17).
- vii. The silence in heaven (VIII. 1-6).

VI

- 1 *And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say-*
- 2 *ing as with a voice of thunder, Come. And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.*
- 3 *And when he opened the second seal, I heard the*
- 4 *second living creature saying, Come. And another horse came forth, a red horse: and to him that sat thereon it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.*
- 5 *And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a black horse; and he that sat thereon had a balance*
- 6 *in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.*
- 7 *And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard the*
- 8 *voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come. And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the*

fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

It is the holy Lamb of God who opens each of the seven seals. All that is shewn in these visions is a manifestation of the perfect wisdom and love of God for His creation; all is embraced in His ultimate purpose for the redemption of the world. The fear of the Lord is the beginning, as it is also the crown and the fulness, of wisdom; but our fear in the face of God's judgments must be the fear, not of panic and despair, but of awe and adoration. It is precisely in times of the greatest calamity, when men's hearts are failing them and when the prevailing mood is one of terror, that we are bidden: 'Lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh'.¹

At the opening of these first four seals each of the four living creatures speaks in order; thus reminding us that the visions here recorded are especially associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the going forth of the Kingdom into the world.

There is universal agreement amongst the ancient commentators that the rider of the white horse is our Lord Himself. He comes forth to take His great powers and to reign, to inaugurate in the world a Kingship and realm, constituted in historical events, yet abiding for ever. He comes 'conquering and to conquer',—victorious alike in the present and in the ages to come. The Christian assurance of the final triumph of good over evil, of truth over error, is no vague promise applying to the distant future; it is a permanent part of the divine order and is being fulfilled from moment to moment through the course of time.

Nevertheless, we are at once recalled to our Lord's

¹Luke xxi. 28.

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mysterious and terrible words. 'I come not to send peace, but a sword.' The riders upon the red, the black and the pale horses follow after Him as His retinue; and they are associated respectively with war, famine and pestilence.

These things are to be interpreted spiritually rather than literally. The red ('fiery coloured') horse and its rider symbolise conflict in the widest sense of the term,—and, as Cardinal Manning said, 'all human conflict is ultimately theological'. At every point the kingdom of God challenges the standards of the world, and the Christian who is true to his vocation experiences the inevitable tension. There seems to be a clear allusion in this seal to the ultimate test of martyrdom.

The visions of the Seals are not to be treated as isolated episodes or scenes. A connected sequence of thought and action runs through them. As, in the field of material history, the will to conquest is inevitably followed by warfare, so the consequence of warfare is scarcity and famine. And it is with famine that the coming forth of the black horse is associated.

But the famine of which we are to think is 'not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord and shall not find it.'¹

In this, the third, seal the horse is black, signifying darkness and contrasting with the white horse which symbolises the light of the Gospel. Hence many commentators consider that this vision refers to the darkness and confusion caused by heresy and false doctrine. Richard of St. Victor, who explains that Satan is the rider alike of the red, the black and the pale horses, thinks that the balance signifies the critical faculty of the human mind

¹Amos viii. 11, 12.

which, in the hand of Satan, may be used to darken, rather than to illuminate, the truths of religion.

Some interpretation on these lines seems as satisfactory as any. Milligan has shewn that the words 'a measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny' signify a condition of great scarcity and hardship. The oil and the wine, symbols of bounty and plenteousness, 'are a figure of the care with which God watches over His chosen people and supplies all their needs'. In this sense, we may contrast the fulness and harmony of the Christian revelation with the impoverishment wrought by heretical teaching. Heresy, by exaggeration of some particular doctrine or some particular aspect of revealed truth, destroys the balance of the whole.

And ultimately, as shewn under the fourth seal, heresy leads to infidelity and spiritual death. The branch severed from the stem of the vine cannot live.

'And *there was given unto them* authority over the fourth part of the earth.' Death and hell have no power of themselves. All dominion is of God; and all things whatsoever serve the ultimate purposes of His love. Since 4 is the number symbolising man, 'the fourth part of the earth' may perhaps be taken to mean the human race as a whole.

VI

- 9 *And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:*
- 10 *And they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*
- 11 *And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and*

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their brethren, which should be killed even as they were, should be fulfilled.

- 12 *And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood;*
13 *And the stars of the heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her unripe figs, when she is shaken of a*
14 *great wind. And the heaven was removed as a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island*
15 *were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the*
16 *mountains; and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the*
17 *Lamb: for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?*

It may be that the souls beneath the sacrificial altar are those of the prophets and martyrs of the Old Testament, who wait for the fulfilling of the times in the Incarnation. Or, again, the vision may refer to the Christian saints and martyrs who look forward in prayer to the second coming of Christ. More probably, both groups are included; and the 'little time' would then mean the whole span of the old and the new dispensations.

The imagery of the sixth seal is closely paralleled in the Book of Joel. And it is to be observed that Joel's prophecy (Joel II. 28-32) was regarded by St. Peter as having been fulfilled on the first day of Pentecost (Acts II. 17-21). Hence, in the vision of the sixth seal we may see an allusion to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the inauguration of Christ's kingdom in the world.

But it seems clear that the vision calls for a wider interpretation. Its application is to the whole Christian age, and more especially to the successive consummations that are to be discerned through the course of Christian history, as well as to the heralding of the final judgment at the end of time. In the procession of thought that is to be traced through the whole series of the Seals we are now confronted with a gathering intensity of evil and with judgments more awe-inspiring than any that have gone before. This vision of the sixth seal reveals a world in darkness, a world in which the light of the Gospel no longer shines, a world in which man gropes in terror and despair, helpless before the manifestation of God's inexorable judgments.

In more than one of the apocalyptic visions the sun, moon and stars are taken to represent Christ, the Church and the saints respectively. And we shall see here a figure of those last days when Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, no longer shines in the hearts of men, when the Church faces the full violence of persecution and widespread apostasy from within her own fold,—a time in which all the things that seemed most enduring in the world are going down in ruin and dissolution.

In these terrible days many men will seek to hide themselves from God by flinging themselves feverishly into every kind of worldly distraction. Yet, in their hearts, they are aware that the calamities which they seek to escape are but the just recompense, the inevitable retribution, for the sins of the world. It is God's judgment that is being manifested; and with that judgment comes the call to repentance which, in His mercy, it is never too late to answer. All may yet be well if man will recognise the divine condemnation and turn to Him in penitence.

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VII

1 *After this I saw four angels standing at the four
corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the
earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the*
2 *sea, or upon any tree. And I saw another angel ascend
from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God:
and he cried with a great voice to the four angels, to*
3 *whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, say-
ing, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees,
till we have sealed the servants of our God on their*
4 *foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were
sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed*
5 *out of every tribe of the children of Israel. Of the tribe
of Judah were sealed twelve thousand: Of the tribe of*
6 *Reuben twelve thousand: Of the tribe of Gad twelve*
7 *thousand: Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand: Of*
8 *the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand: Of the tribe*
9 *of Manasseh twelve thousand: Of the tribe of Simeon*
10 *twelve thousand: Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand:*
11 *Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand: Of the*
12 *tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand: Of the tribe of*
13 *Joseph twelve thousand: Of the tribe of Benjamin were*
14 *sealed twelve thousand. After these things I saw, and*
15 *behold, a great multitude, which no man could number,*
16 *out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and*
17 *tongues, standing before the throne and before the*
18 *Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands;*
19 *And they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto*
20 *our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the*
21 *Lamb. And all the angels were standing round about the*
22 *throne, and about the elders and the four living crea-*
23 *tures; and they fell before the throne on their faces,*
24 *and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and*
25 *glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and*

power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.
 13 *Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me,*
These which are arrayed in the white robes, who are
 14 *they, and whence came they? And I say unto him, My*
lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they
which come out of the great tribulation, and they
washed their robes, and made them white in the blood
 15 *of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of*
God; and they serve him day and night in his temple:
and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his taber-
 16 *nacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither*
thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them,
 17 *nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the*
throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them
unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe
away every tear from their eyes.

Between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, interrupting, as it were, the unfolding sequence of divine judgment, these two visions of consolation are interposed. They represent the same mystery seen under two different aspects; for it is clear that the sealed company of the one hundred and forty-four thousand is to be identified with the 'great multitude which no man could number'. In the first vision we are shewn the secret predestination of God, the setting apart of a chosen people to be His vessels and witnesses for the salvation of the world. In the second, the fruits of that election, the glory and splendour of the Christian vocation, are displayed in one of the most sublimely beautiful passages in all the written works of man.

The imagery of the first three verses may refer to the preservation of the elect people of God, not from worldly peril and suffering, but from all evil things which may

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assault and hurt the soul. For throughout the Apocalypse 'winds' seem to symbolise false doctrine, superstition,—all the invisible forces of evil that tempt and torment the spirit of man. In the same way, 'the earth' represents the kingdom of the reprobate as opposed to the kingdom of God,—the world ignoring or wilfully denying God and turning from Him; whilst 'the sea' is a symbol of the corrupt nature of man unregenerate, storm-tossed by undisciplined pride and passion.

The angel from the sunrising represents Christ and His Church. In the language of symbolism the orient is always associated with the coming of the light of the world. Thus, following upon the imagery of the sixth seal when 'the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light and the stars shall fall from heaven',¹ we are carried on in thought to the further fulfilment of the times when 'he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other'.²

The act of sealing signifies both the communication of the divine nature in the seal of baptism and also, more especially, the calling apart of a people consecrated thereby to share in the sacrificial life of Christ and to manifest His Kingdom to the world; as it is written, 'Him hath God the Father sealed,'³ and again, 'The firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.'⁴

The sealed company therefore represents the predestined number of the elect in the mystery of the divine providence. 'Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye

¹Matthew xxiv. 29.

³John vi. 27.

²*id.*, 31.

⁴2 Timothy ii. 19.

may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in times past were no people, but now are the people of God.¹ 12 is the number of election; it is here multiplied by itself and then by 1000 to express the strongest emphasis and the most complete fulfilment.

God has not chosen to reveal Himself or His purpose to all men equally. In every generation it has been His pleasure to call certain souls for the work of His kingdom in the world,—not as a kind of favoured *élite*, but as constituting a society dedicated to His special service, cherished at all times by His special care and set apart as His appointed instrument for the sanctification of the world. This society, the realm or Kingdom of Christ, is in the world, yet not of the world; it is manifested in time, yet belongs to eternity; it is displayed in history, yet its true life is hidden in the invisible order of God.

We cannot, in the present divided condition of Christendom, identify this Kingdom with the visible communion of the Catholic Church. We can affirm, to use some recent words of Fr. Curtis,² that the Catholic Church is the one authorised and uniquely valid representative of the Kingdom; and we must recognise that the borders of the Kingdom are at once wider and, in another sense, narrower than those of the visible Church.

But one thing is certain. It is not for us to count the number of those who have been sealed. In the second vision here recorded St. John saw them as a great multitude 'which no *man* could number'. The Lord knows those whom He has chosen; their names are ever present to Him and their needs are His constant care. But the mystery of

¹1 Peter ii. 9, 10.

²Article, 'Christus Rex', *C.R. Quarterly Chronicle*, Christmas 1939.

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these things is hidden from the mind of man; it is enough for us to know that the company of the redeemed is an innumerable host 'out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues'.

On the wonderful vision of this great multitude 'standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes and palms in their hands', no comment is necessary. Every figure, as Isaac Williams observes, is a sacrament; every word is from the treasury of God. Discussion and attempted explanation could only have the effect of blundering and bathos.

But one point is worth emphasis. It is evident that the vision refers, not only to the glory of the blessed ones in heaven, but to the life of the Christian soul in the world here and now. And who that, in this present pilgrimage, has been granted some glimpse of the 'unsearchable riches of Christ' will affirm that the language of the seer is extravagant?

It is to be observed in conclusion that there is another sense in which these two visions may be compared. The sealing and numeration of the twelve tribes may represent the special preparatory revelation given to the Hebrew peoples; whilst the countless multitude shews the fulfilment of that revelation in the Christian Gospel, which is to be preached to the whole world.

VIII

- 1 *And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed*
- 2 *a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.*
- 3 *And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers*

*of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before
4 the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the
prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the
5 angel's hand. And the angel taketh the censer; and he
filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the
earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and
lightnings, and an earthquake.*

*6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets
prepared themselves to sound.*

In the visions of the Seals we have been shewn, in rather general terms, the nature of the necessary conflict between the Church and the world. The judgments heralded by the seven Trumpets are more specific; they deal with what we may call the external history of the Church. Like the Seals, they cover the whole Christian age in their survey; they are of universal application and their teaching is as vivid and relevant to-day as at the time of their original revelation to St. John. It is interesting to note, on the one hand, how close is the parallelism of thought and symbol between the two series of Seals and Trumpets; and, on the other, how the latter expands and clarifies the teaching of the former.

The mystery of the divine election is not exhausted by the sanctifying and redemptive mission of the Catholic Church in the world. This holy city of Christ's Church on earth, His own mystical body, is in all ages profaned and contaminated by her contact with the world,—by her readiness to adopt the world's standards, to compromise, to seek material riches and to win the world's honour and approval. She is, on the one hand, a supernatural kingdom, charged with the proclamation of the eternal word of God and with the ministry of the sacraments; she is, on the other hand, a human association, made up of sinful men

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and subject to the limitations which affect the whole order of history and nature.

But within her sacred walls there is an inner court,—the elect company of faithful witnesses, the salt by which the savour of the whole is preserved. The Apocalypse is full of this thought; it is developed under the most varied forms and symbols, and, as the visions proceed, the distinction between the society of the Church militant, the chosen people as a whole, on the one hand and the 'faithful remnant' within her walls on the other, is brought out more sharply and even, we might say, more relentlessly.

It was on the seventh day that God rested from the work of creation, and it was on the seventh day that the human body of Christ lay in the silence of the tomb. The silence in heaven may therefore signify the silence of consummation appropriate to the completion of the visions of the Seals, and also the silence of suspense and preparation; as it is written, 'Be silent, O all flesh, before the Lord, for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.'¹ This thought is also expressed by the symbolic interval of half an hour: for the half of anything implies the idea of interruption, as of a process yet unfinished, and we have seen that the judgments of the Seals are, in one sense, preparatory in thought to those of the Trumpets. Indeed, the seven Trumpets are, as it were, contained within the seventh Seal; they recapitulate and develop the teaching of the visions of the Seals.

The seven angels standing before the throne of God prepare to sound. In these verses we see how the judgments that are to follow are bound up with the worship of the angelic host and with the prayers of the saints. They express the sovereign will of God; and His will, being perfect in love and in justice, is our peace. The altar is of

¹Zechariah ii. 13.

gold, as shewing how precious in the sight of the Lord are the prayers of His Church and as indicating the acceptance and sanctifying of those prayers in union with the sacrifice of the Cross. It is from the very heart and centre of this realm of prayer that the visions of the Trumpets proceed; we could have no firmer assurance that, in the divine providence, all things are directed to the ultimate salvation of the world.

(2) THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

VIII

- 7 *And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and the third part of the trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.*
- 8 *And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and*
- 9 *the third part of the sea became blood; and there died the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, even they that had life; and the third part of the ships was destroyed.*
- 10 *And the third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of*
- 11 *the waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.*
- 12 *And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; that the third part of them should be darkened, and the day should not shine for the third part of it, and the night in like manner.*

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- 13 *And I saw, and I heard an eagle, flying in mid heaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe, for them that dwell on the earth, by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, who are yet to sound.*

The First Trumpet. The fire mingled with blood cast upon the earth symbolises the Incarnation and the earthly life of our Lord, who Himself declared, 'I am come to send fire upon the earth.' The mingling of blood with the fire speaks of His Passion.

3, as already noted, is the number of divinity. The 'third part' (here, as later in these visions) therefore signifies the action and judgment of God Himself, the divine invasion of the human realm.

The trees and the green grass, as is clearly shown in the next chapter (IX. 4), symbolise those who have ears to hear the message of the Gospel, those whom God has sealed and chosen out of the world to be His disciples and His witnesses. Their hearts are lit and consumed by the sacred fire of Christ's 'new creation'.

The Second Trumpet. We are reminded of our Lord's words that, if we had faith, we should say to this mountain, 'Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea.'

The great mountain of this vision, radiant with the same holy fire, symbolises the Catholic Church cast into the sea of human destiny. 'And the third part of the sea became blood,'—that is, by the merciful initiative of God, the gift of salvation is offered to all mankind through the blood of Christ. And this gift brings with it a death to sin, a withering of all wrong inclinations and affections.

The Third Trumpet. This vision we understand as referring to that great scourge that has tormented the Church through the ages and so grievously impaired her

witness,—the scourge of heresy,—‘false doctrine, heresy and schism.’ It is as the light of a baleful star. Its evil power is such that the doctrines of the Christian revelation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (symbolised by the ‘rivers’ and the ‘fountains of the waters’,—a figure used by our Lord in John VII. 38, 39) are soured and contaminated by its touch; so that, instead of giving life, they bring spiritual death. We are inclined to think of heresy as a mere impoverishment, a subtraction from the full richness of Catholic belief and practice. But this vision suggests that it is a thing far more terrible than that; it is, in its results, a turning of the waters of life into a draught of deadly poison.

The Fourth Trumpet. And heresy is a downward slope that leads eventually to infidelity and spiritual darkness,—to the loss of the sense of divine things and even of the desire for those things. It is one of the clearest lessons of Christian history that separation from the Church means, ultimately, separation from Christ; and separation from Christ is separation from God. This truth seems to be here symbolised by the darkening of the sun, moon and stars.

Yet the reiteration of the phrase ‘the third part’ shews that all is under the controlling hand of God; there has been no escape from His overruling providence. In all that happens His justice is vindicated, man’s wilfulness is rebuked.

As with the Seals, the visions of the Trumpets shew a clear line of division between the first four and the last three. The imagery of the first four Trumpets is taken from the world of nature,—the earth, the sea, rivers and fountains, the sun, the moon and the stars. The last three Trumpets are heralded as three ‘Woes’ or judgments in which deeper mysteries are revealed.

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IX

1 *And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from
heaven fallen unto the earth: and there was given to*
2 *him the key of the pit of the abyss. And he opened the
pit of the abyss; and there went up a smoke out of the
pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and
the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the*
3 *pit. And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the
earth; and power was given them, as the scorpions of*
4 *the earth have power. And it was said unto them that
they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any
green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as have*
5 *not the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given
them that they should not kill them, but that they
should be tormented five months: and their torment
was as the torment of a scorpion, when it striketh a*
6 *man. And in those days men shall seek death, and shall
in no wise find it; and they shall desire to die, and death*
7 *fleeth from them. And the shapes of the locusts were
like unto horses prepared for war; and upon their heads
as it were crowns like unto gold, and their faces were*
8 *as men's faces. And they had hair as the hair of*
9 *women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And
they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron;
and the sound of their wings was as the sound of*
10 *chariots, of many horses rushing to war. And they have
tails like unto scorpions, and stings; and in their tails*
11 *is their power to hurt men five months. They have over
them as king the angel of the abyss: his name in
Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek tongue he hath
the name Apollyon.*

The Fifth Trumpet. It is to be observed that the visitation or judgment announced by this trumpet falls only

upon those who 'have not the seal of God on their foreheads'. Now, as we have seen, the Trumpets deal with the Church as distinct from the world; and hence it would seem that this fifth judgment (or the first Woe) refers especially to degeneracy and faithlessness within the Church.

The vision displays the raging of that great conflict of which St. Paul had written. 'For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.'¹ The hosts of Satan are seen by St. John darkening the spiritual firmament, stinging and scourging the souls of men with the fierce irritant of temptation.

The star falling from heaven is the Adversary himself; as it is written, 'I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven,'² and again, 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!'³ The locusts, reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt, represent the evil spirits attendant upon him. But neither they nor Satan himself have any final power of themselves. 'Power was given them . . .', 'it was said unto them . . .', 'it was given them . . .',—all is under the sovereign authority of God who will not suffer any man to be tempted beyond his strength.

And relief will come, even from the most terrible trials in the Tempter's power. Five months was the time of the Flood's duration; and during that time God remembered Noah and brought him to safety. Moreover, the number 5, as of the five wounds of Christ, may suggest the union and consecration of all their sufferings in the Sacred Passion.

The imagery of these verses displays, with an overwhelming power and a most searching insight, the

¹Ephesians vi. 12.

²Luke x. 18.

³Isaiah xiv. 12.

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raging of the fires of temptation. The forces of evil seem irresistible in their might, savage in their anticipation of triumph, relentless in their assault. How gigantic is the stage of this conflict! It is a spiritual warfare whose greatest battles are fought out in an invisible realm, where Satan and his minions contend for the souls of men. And, at the same time, it is a conflict tearing each individual soul apart—‘for the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do.’¹

But the time of trial is limited. It is for the testing and correction of men, not for their condemnation. And there is the final mystery of this scourge, that it is not permitted to harm the elect, but only to strengthen them. ‘The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment.’²

IX

12 *The first Woe is past: behold, there come yet two Woes hereafter.*

13 *And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God,*
14 *one saying to the sixth angel, which had the trumpet,*
Loose the four angels which are bound at the great
15 *river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed,*
which had been prepared for the hour and day and
month and year, that they should kill the third part of
16 *men. And the number of the armies of the horsemen*
was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the
17 *number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision,*
and them that sat on them, having breastplates as of
fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone: and the heads
of the horses are as the heads of lions; and out of their

¹Romans vii. 19.

²2 Peter ii. 9.

18 *mouths proceedeth fire and smoke and brimstone. By*
these three plagues was the third part of men killed, by
the fire and the smoke and the brimstone, which pro-
 19 *ceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses*
is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails are
like unto serpents, and have heads; and with them they
 20 *do hurt. And the rest of mankind, which were not killed*
with these plagues, repented not of the works of their
hands, that they should not worship devils, and the
idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone,
and of wood; which can neither see, nor hear, nor walk:
 21 *and they repented not of their murders, nor of their*
sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

The Sixth Trumpet. It seems clear that in this vision some deepening of the mystery of iniquity is indicated and that the judgment displayed is visited especially upon the Church Degenerate. We must remember that the horse in Old Testament imagery is always associated with the onrush and assault of invading armies. The horse always symbolises warfare.

This second Woe, issuing from the golden altar in heaven and heralded by four angels, is seen as a visitation upon the Church, not upon the world, and as a foreshadowing of the coming of Antichrist.

The river Euphrates is the river of Babylon; and Babylon, as we shall see later, is to be identified primarily with the Harlot Church, with the very principle of corrupt religion. The keynote of the great visions of the later chapters is the contrast between the Harlot and the Bride, between Babylon and the New Jerusalem.

Hence, the loosing of the river Euphrates and the assault of the Babylonian horsemen may symbolise, upon the greatest scale, the spirit of intellectual pride and rebel-

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lion against God. The bursting of the river banks may signify the breaking down of all the restraints of reason and right thinking. In religion the spirit of an undisciplined rationalism can only lead to the corruption of revealed truth and, ultimately, to apostasy.

It is a dangerous fallacy to think that the mind of man can operate with the same impartiality and penetration in matters affecting his final destiny as in, say, the abstract problems of mathematics. On the contrary, his intellect is clouded and limited by the radical disorder running through his whole nature,—by the fact of sin. And the exaltation of the intellect to absolute sovereignty leads, not to freedom and happiness, but to frustration and despair.

Moreover, we know from experience that, when men find themselves in this terrible condition, 'having no hope and without God in the world,' they seem often to have no power of themselves to discern their true state and to take the way to repentance. Spiritual intuition seems to have been parched by the fire and brimstone of intellectual pride, and the vision of spiritual realities to have been clouded by the smoke of unconsecrated thought and speculation.

X

- 1 *And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, arrayed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun, and his feet as*
- 2 *pillars of fire; and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left*
- 3 *upon the earth; and he cried with a great voice, as a lion roareth: and when he cried, the seven thunders*
- 4 *uttered their voices. And when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying, Seal up the things which*

5 the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. And
 the angel which I saw standing upon the sea and upon
 6 the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore
 by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created the
 heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth
 and the things that are therein, and the sea and the
 things that are therein, that there shall be time no
 7 longer: but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel,
 when he is about to sound, then is finished the mystery
 of God, according to the good tidings which he declared
 8 to his servants the prophets. And the voice which I
 heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me,
 and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the
 hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon
 9 the earth. And I went unto the angel, saying unto him
 that he should give me the little book. And he saith
 unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy
 belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as
 10 honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's
 hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as
 honey: and when I had eaten it, my belly was made
 11 bitter. And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy
 again over many peoples and nations and tongues and
 kings.

Between the sixth and the seventh seals were interposed the visions (1) of the sealing of the 144,000 and (2) of the countless multitude before the throne of God. We saw that these visions displayed the same mystery under two different aspects.

A similar arrangement is to be observed in the succession of the Trumpets. Between the sixth trumpet and the seventh the seer records the visions of the Little Book and of the Two Witnesses. We may expect that the parallelism

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with the earlier series will be maintained and that each vision will be seen to be complementary to the other.

In the opening verse St. John again beholds our Lord. His living presence and activity are personalised in the figure of a 'strong angel coming down out of heaven'. He is clothed in the fulness of judicial majesty, as by a cloud. The rainbow encircling His head symbolises His covenant of mercy with His creatures. His face shines with the radiance of His perfect holiness. His kingdom on earth, represented by His feet, is a pillar of fire giving light to the whole world.

He comes in mercy, but also in judgment; as it is written, 'For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.'¹ The sound of His voice is the fulfilment of the divine justice; but the execution of His judgment is not yet to be revealed. As St. Paul was caught up into heaven and 'heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter',² so St. John was commanded to seal up these mysteries, since the time of their revelation had not come.

The word 'time' in the Apocalypse is a sort of technical term by which St. John designates the whole span of the Christian age; our Lord is here heralding the consummation of the world and the completion of God's purpose for all His creation. But it may be that the meaning of these verses is not exhausted by their reference to the Second Coming. Both in the Seals and in the Trumpets we seem to be following a process or cycle that has been exemplified more than once in the history of the Church,—a process of steady declension from good until the triumph of the powers of evil seems nearly complete. 'The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if

¹John ix. 39.

²2 Corinthians xii. 4.

there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.'¹

It is in that moment of darkness (not before) that the vision of the Son of Man is seen coming down from heaven. It is then (but not till then) that the mystery of God is finished, 'according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets'; it is then that a new regeneration, the first sign of a new dawn, at last becomes apparent. So, surely, it has been with the Church through the long ages of her history in the world.

The 'little book', as distinct from the sealed book of chapter V which deals with the whole world, is the book of God's will and purpose for His elect society, the Catholic Church. The metaphor under which the seer is commanded to eat and to digest the book is intended to shew that a man cannot communicate a truth if he has merely heard it spoken. The truth must be grasped, considered, understood and assimilated. And with the 'little book' of the Church's destiny how tragic would be the effect of full understanding! How chastening is any serious reflection upon the past and present history of the Church! On the one hand, we see the splendour of her vocation, the abiding presence of Christ upon her altars, the indwelling wisdom of the Holy Ghost leading her into all truth, the sevenfold ministry of the Sacraments spanning the vault of man's mortal life, the beauty and the power of the lives of her saints,—and against these things, the corruption and faithlessness of every kind that have stained her history. There is the sweetness of honey and also the bitterness of wormwood. The sweetness is God's goodness; the bitterness is man's ingratitude.

In the closing words we are perhaps to see an allusion

¹Psalm xiv. 2, 3.

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to the world-wide mission of the Catholic Church. St. John has been shewn, in the pages of the 'little book', the greatness both of her glory and of her failure. But she, and she alone, has the divine commission to preach the Gospel to all nations and peoples.

XI

1 *And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and one said, Rise, and measure the temple of God,*
2 *and the altar, and them that worship therein. And the court which is without the temple leave without, and measure it not; for it hath been given unto the nations: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and*
3 *two months. And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and*
4 *threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks, standing before*
5 *the Lord of the earth. And if any man desireth to hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man shall desire to hurt them,*
6 *in this manner must he be killed. These have the power to shut the heaven, that it rain not during the days of their prophecy: and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every*
7 *plague, as often as they shall desire. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that cometh up out of the abyss shall make war with them,*
8 *and overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord*
9 *was crucified. And from among the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations do men look upon their dead bodies three days and a half, and suffer not their dead*
10 *bodies to be laid in a tomb. And they that dwell on the*

earth rejoice over them, and make merry; and they shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell on the earth. And after the three days and a half the breath of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which beheld them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they went up into heaven in the cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons: and the rest were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Throughout the Apocalypse the sequence of thought is progressive. A passing and sometimes obscure allusion in one vision grows out of something previously suggested. And in these verses our minds are brought back to a thought that has already been expressed,—the contrast, the sharp line of separation, between the inner sanctuary of the Temple where the faithful worshippers are assembled in the presence of God, and the outer court, which belongs to the Temple area, but is profaned by various forms of trafficking, hypocrisy and impiety. It is the contrast between the ‘remnant’ of true believers and the Church as a whole, soiled and contaminated by her contact with the world. It is to be noted that only the inner sanctuary and those that worship therein are to be measured.

Measurement, in the imagery of Scripture, implies the idea of preservation and protection. Those who are measured (or ‘numbered’ or ‘sealed’,—the interpretation is the same) are known to God and held perpetually in His care. The thing measured is precious to him who measures it.

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Thus, measurement signifies also the showing forth or delineation of the beauty of that which is measured. It is the thought expressed by the Psalmist,—‘Walk about Zion and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.’¹ Let men see how tenderly the Lord watches over them that are His, how secure is their habitation, how splendid their inheritance; that they may turn to Him and enter into His Kingdom.

The period of forty-two months in verse 2 is identical with the twelve hundred and sixty days of verse 3. We shall find these periods mentioned in the vision of the Woman and the Dragon, and elsewhere in the book. The reckoning is variously given in days or in months or in years; but in each case the meaning appears to be the same. It is a period symbolising the whole Christian age, considered specially as a time of testing and tribulation. 1260 days = 42 months = $3\frac{1}{2}$ years; and $3\frac{1}{2}$ (the half of 7) signifies that nothing is brought to completeness in this world.

The vision of the Two Witnesses displays the nature of the Christian vocation here below. The number 2 is symbolical, and itself represents the idea of witness and the preparation of the way of the Lord. By two and two the Apostles were sent forth. Before our Lord’s regal entry into Jerusalem, two of the twelve were sent to fetch the ass upon which He was to ride. Two disciples were sent to make ready the passover. In a court of law two witnesses are necessary to establish truth.

Hence it would appear that the Two Witnesses of this vision are to be identified with the faithful worshippers who are to be measured within the sanctuary of the Temple.

¹Psalm xlviii. 12–14.

The imagery used to describe their mission recalls St. Paul's mysterious saying that:

'We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are a savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life: and who is sufficient for these things?'¹

Their testimony is a consuming fire; as it is written, 'Behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.'² Their lives are consecrated to sacrificial service. By the powers of evil in the world,—'The beast that cometh up out of the abyss' is an anticipation of the vision of chapter XIII where his character and power for evil are fully revealed,—they are violently opposed and persecuted. And not only this: by the Church itself,—the 'official', corrupt Church, here symbolised by the city of Jerusalem, 'where also their Lord was crucified',—they will be assailed in their lifetimes and dishonoured in death. Many of the saints have, at one time or another, met with opposition and even hatred from the 'official' Church; in most cases recognition of sanctity comes tardily.

It is the special character of the Christian Gospel that it should offend and torment the world by its challenge. The last stage of spiritual degeneracy is reached when the voice of the Church is accorded a lazy acquiescence and vague approval.

Much of the symbolism of this vision is exceedingly difficult to understand; and it would be presumptuous to suggest that any one line of interpretation is either certain or exhaustive. It may be that the chief lesson to be drawn from the vision is that the life of the Church is not only a mystical continuation of the life of Christ, but that it must be, in some sense, a recapitulation of His earthly life. The

¹2 Corinthians ii. 15, 16.

²Jeremiah v. 14.

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Church must teach as He taught, suffer as He suffered, die to the world as He died; and by the divine life which is hers, she will again and again rise from apparent extinction to a renewal of her witness. This is the message of the 'little book' wherein sweetness and bitterness are so intimately mingled; and this is the message which the vision of the Two Witnesses expands and clarifies.

XI

- 14 *The second Woe is past: behold, the third Woe cometh quickly.*
- 15 *And the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of*
- 16 *his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders, which sit before God on their thrones, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,*
- 17 *Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, which art and which wast; because thou hast*
- 18 *taken thy great power, and didst reign. And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath came, and the time of the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, the small and the great; and to destroy them that destroy the earth.*
- 19 *And there was opened the temple of God that is in heaven; and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant; and there followed lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail.*

The Seventh Trumpet. The last of the Trumpet visions brings the series to a consummation, not in time, but in thought. It seems to have a double significance, as foreshadowing the final judgment and also as referring to the whole Christian dispensation. For the reign of Christ is a

thing already achieved and accomplished, however little the world may recognise it. Christ is King and His sovereignty cannot be alienated. It is significant that the four living creatures do not appear in this vision; those who offer their homage and thanksgiving before the throne are the four and twenty elders, representing the consecrated priesthood of the old and the new law.

The judgments of God are to be received, both in the course of the world's history and at their final promulgation at the last day, with joy and thankfulness. It is in judgment that the divine justice is vindicated and the fulness of divine love made manifest. 'Let the heavens rejoice,' declares the Psalmist, 'and let the earth be glad . . . before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth; he shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with his truth.'¹

Thus the visions of the Trumpets conclude upon a note of triumph. 'Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.'² That is our assurance in the present and our hope in the future.

(3) THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

XII

- 1 *And a great sign was seen in heaven; a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and*
- 2 *upon her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child: and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and*
- 3 *in pain to be delivered. And there was seen another sign in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven*
- 4 *diadems. And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was about*

¹Psalm xcvi. 11-13.

²Psalm lxxxv. 11.

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*to be delivered, that when she was delivered he might
5 devour her child. And she was delivered of a son, a
man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of
iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto
6 his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness,
where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they
may nourish her a thousand two hundred and three-
score days.*

Many commentators have felt that this is the most difficult vision in the whole book to interpret satisfactorily. It is the first of three visions, closely related to one another, which are central, not only to the sevenfold grouping of chapters VI–XVIII, but to the book as a whole.

Under one figure it is clear that the woman gloriously clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet and a crown of twelve stars upon her head, represents our Lady; but she also, and perhaps primarily, symbolises the Church. The pain of her travail is continuous; for every soul received into her fellowship is thereby born again of water and of the spirit. Type and antitype are wonderfully blended throughout these visions. The travail of the Church is also a mystical figure of the Incarnation; for, as the soul is reborn in the waters of baptism, so Christ is Himself born again in each individual Christian.

The Dragon is Satan himself in the plenitude of his evil power,—the first great Adversary of the Church. ‘And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven’,—that is, he drew with him, in his act of rebellion, other angels whom God cast out of heaven with him. And during this time of probation Satan and his attendant spirits are permitted to assault the souls of men upon earth, ever seeking to frustrate the saving mission of the Church and to devour her children.

Verse 5 is best rendered:

‘And she was delivered of a son, a man-child, who as a shepherd shall tend all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God and to his throne.’

Here we are brought back to the mystical identity of the child with our Lord. The term ‘nations’ in the Apocalypse refers always to the wicked, to those who rebel against and defy the sovereign authority of God. The mixed metaphor of the shepherd wielding a sceptre of iron is of deep significance. The divine tutelage is exercised, not only in mercy, but in judgment also; and the gentleness of love is one with the severity of justice. But the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual kingdom; and until His second coming to judge the world He reigns in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

There is another sense in which the man-child symbolises, not only our Lord Himself, but all those who are true to Him. In the letter to the Church at Thyatira it was promised to ‘him that overcometh’ that to him should be given power over the nations (i.e. over all things sinful) ‘and he shall rule them with a rod of iron’. And in the present passage we may note that the child is to be ‘caught up unto God and unto his throne’,—not into heaven, but to be a sharer in His reign of love. ‘Even when we were dead through our trespasses, . . . (he) raised us up with him and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.’¹ The fulfilment of the promise is thus seen to belong to the present life as well as to the future, to this world as well as to the next.

In the meanwhile, through the whole course of the Christian dispensation, the Catholic Church must fulfil her witness in that place of exile which we call the world. The man-child is the same as the Two Witnesses of the

¹Ephesians ii. 5, 6.

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previous vision and the sealed company of chapter VII. As the Master was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to suffer the full assault of Satan, so the Church must go out to endure hunger and thirst, temptation and every desolation of the spirit. She is in the world, yet not of the world. Evil may assail and wound, but can never overcome her; for she is sustained by celestial food and by the living waters of the Spirit. Her true life is 'hid with Christ in God'.¹

XII

7 *And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels
going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon
8 warred and his angels; and they prevailed not, neither
9 was their place found any more in heaven. And the
great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that
is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole
world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels
10 were cast down with him. And I heard a great voice in
heaven, saying, Now is come the salvation, and the
power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority
of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast
down, which accuseth them before our God day and
11 night. And they overcame him because of the blood of
the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony;
12 and they loved not their life even unto death. Therefore
rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for
the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone
down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he
hath but a short time.*

These verses form a kind of parenthesis and show the nature of the Church's conflict in a different aspect. The

¹Colossians iii. 3.

Church and the world are contrasted under the symbols of 'heaven' and 'earth and sea'. Within the fold of the Church, though Satan may rage furiously, he can never prevail; he is a foe already conquered. Our Lord declared, 'I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven,' and gave the apostles authority 'over all the power of the enemy'¹. In his earthly struggle every Christian may know that Michael and the angelic host stand at his side.

This interpretation does not, of course, exclude the clear allusion to the aboriginal warfare in heaven and the casting out of Satan. But the theme of the vision displays the conflict between good and evil in the widest sense; and it is the final victory, won for mankind once and for all by the sacrifice of Calvary, that is celebrated in the triumphant anthem of verses 10-12. 'O heavens and ye that dwell in them' refers to the faithful servants of Christ in every age. 'The earth' and 'the sea' are those who are turned away from God and absorbed by the things of this world, by 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life'.² Over them indeed, during the 'short time' of this earthly dispensation, Satan exercises his sinister dominion. Though they may not know it, they are his slaves.

XII

- 13 *And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth*
 14 *the man child. And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face*
 15 *of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth after the woman water as a river, that he might*

¹Luke x. 19.

²1 John ii. 16.

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16 *cause her to be carried away by the stream. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the river which the dragon*
17 *cast out of his mouth. And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus.*

The original theme has been resumed and elaborated. The Woman, as we have seen, symbolises the Catholic Church; and as long as her faith is incorrupt and her witness steadfast, she must expect in this world nothing but hostility. Yet at all times she is under the sheltering care of God. 'Ye have seen . . . how I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself.'¹ In the wilderness of temptation she will always be sustained; and in the wilderness of solitude and withdrawal from the world her successive regenerations will always be prepared. She will speak always with the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

The 'time and times and half a time' is that period of three and a half years or forty-two months or twelve hundred and sixty days, whose significance we have already considered. It represents the Christian age, considered as the Church's time of witness and probation.

It is from the inspiration of the Adversary that have come, in the different epochs of Christian history, those torrents of false doctrine by which the true faith has been corrupted,—notably the great heresies and the internal conflicts that have been the occasions of schism. From him, too, we must believe, comes the prompting of all efforts to dilute the faith to the world's standards, to compromise with the world, to blur the clear lines of the Gospel message, to be satisfied with what is 'fairly good'

¹Exodus xix. 4.

or 'not so bad'. This is the kind of Christianity that the world heartily approves; 'if ye were of the world, the world would love its own'.¹ The world is fully prepared to 'swallow up', to absorb and to adopt this easygoing, pleasurable sort of religion. When the Church is content with this feeble kind of witness, then the Church and the world are good friends, and the world will patronise and protect the Church. Her security and freedom will be shared by the 'faithful remnant' of true believers, who will, in that sense, profit by her defection.

But Satan is not deceived. His assaults are not relaxed; and they are pressed hardest precisely where the resistance to them is most firm.

(4) THE BEAST FROM THE SEA AND THE BEAST FROM THE LAND

XIII

1 *And he stood upon the sand of the sea.*

And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast; and they worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast, and who is able to war with him? And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority

¹John xv. 19.

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6 to continue forty and two months. And he opened his
mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his
name, and his tabernacle, even them that dwell in the
7 heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with
the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given
to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue
8 and nation. And all that dwell on the earth shall wor-
ship him, every one whose name hath not been written
in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain
9 from the foundation of the world. If any man hath an
10 ear, let him hear. If any man is for captivity, into
captivity he goeth: if any man shall kill with the sword,
with the sword must he be killed. Here is the patience
and the faith of the saints.

The dragon and the two beasts of this chapter make up the unholy trinity of evil. They are three in person, three in diversity of function, yet one in essence. The dragon is the sovereign agent of the powers of evil; the first beast is a travesty of the figure of Christ; and the second beast, as described, is a parody of the Holy Spirit.

Like the four beasts in the Book of Daniel, the first beast rises up out of the sea of the world's sin. He is a kind of composite figure, combining features from each of Daniel's four beasts; but he is not to be identified with any one of them. Indeed, if we are searching for parallels, we shall probably conclude that St. John's Beast from the Sea is the same as the Little Horn of Daniel's fourth beast. It is more important at the moment to note that he is clearly to be identified with 'the beast that cometh up out of the abyss' who was shown as assailing and overcoming the Two Witnesses.

All the ancient commentators are agreed that the first beast represents Antichrist. It would appear quite unpro-

fitable to seek to identify him (or the second beast) with this or that nation or empire, or with any particular individual. There may be periods in history of which one feels that this vision speaks in terms unmistakable; there may even be historical persons whose character and actions seem to have been exactly those ascribed to one of these two beasts. But we have seen that the visions of the Apocalypse are throughout to be understood symbolically; and it would be inconsistent to suppose that, in one particular vision, a totally different method of interpretation is to be adopted. All is in time, yet independent of time. The meaning of the visions cannot be exhausted by any particular local or temporal circumstances. We are studying the operation of great principles which transcend history and by which, at the same time, all history is governed.

The spirit of Antichrist was already active in the world when St. John wrote his first epistle. It has been active ever since, though perhaps in varying degrees; and it is surely most active in the world to-day. The language of St. Paul seems to suggest that, in the last phase of Christian dispensation, there will come an almost universal apostasy, and that all the forces of evil and rebellion against God will be gathered up and personalised in a particular man,—the true Antichrist, ‘even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.’¹

And we further understand that this fearful apostasy and the appearance of Antichrist will be the prelude to the second coming of our Lord. This teaching is a direct development of our Lord’s own words, and we accept it as one of the unsearchable mysteries of our faith. But just as the spirit of Antichrist is an ever-present reality,—held in

¹2 Thessalonians ii. 9.

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some check in certain ages, rampantly aggressive in others,—so Christ is always coming in judgment, and it is the special task of the Church to discern and to proclaim His judgments in the world. Certainly, also, the worse the state of the world seems, the keener must be the Christian's watchfulness for the first signs of the new dawn, the more fervent his faith and the more confident his hope.

Two characteristics of the first beast are emphasized,—the universality of his power, as indicated by the 'ten horns and seven heads,' and the violence of his antagonism to God. His sovereignty is over 'all that dwell on the earth',—that is, over the whole kingdom of the reprobate, by whom he is accorded the homage of worship and over whom he exercises vicariously the authority of Satan. He is the incarnate spirit of a militant atheism, a self-sufficient worldliness; and he is to exercise his power through all the 'forty and two months' of the Christian age. The mysterious allusion to the 'death-stroke' of one of his heads may be a parallel to the 'fall' and defeat of Satan effected by the Incarnation; but the beast, like Satan, is permitted a recovery or resurrection to exercise his evil dominion until the fulfilment of the times.

The warfare which the beast perpetually wages on earth against the Church is an extension of that aboriginal conflict in heaven which Michael warred with the dragon. The name Michael signifies 'Who is like unto God?'; and the war-cry of those who worship the beast is the blasphemous challenge, 'Who is like unto the beast?' He is the enemy and destroyer of all things sacred. His influence extends to every age and to every nation and society.

'It may be found in the Church and in the State, in every society, in every family and even in every heart; for wherever man is ruled by the seen instead of the unseen or by the material instead of the spiritual, there the

“world” is,¹—and there also is the spirit which gives its homage to the Beast from the Sea.

But ‘the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery and their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace’.² In spite of every temptation and tribulation to which they may be exposed, the elect people are secure in the protection of the everlasting arms. Those who lead others into captivity and slavery of sin will themselves be held fast in the same horrible prison. He who assaults the souls of others will, in his evil courses, suffer the loss of his own soul. But in stedfast waiting upon God is ‘the patience and the faith of the saints’.

XIII

- 11 *And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth;*
and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spake as
 12 *a dragon. And he exerciseth all the authority of the*
first beast in his sight. And he maketh the earth and
them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose
 13 *death-stroke was healed. And he doeth great signs, that*
he should even make fire to come down out of heaven
 14 *upon the earth in the sight of men. And he deceiveth*
them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs
which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast;
saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should
make an image to the beast, who hath the stroke of the
 15 *sword, and lived. And it was given unto him to give*
breath to it, even to the image of the beast, that the
image of the beast should both speak, and cause that
as many as should not worship the image of the beast

¹W. Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 225.

²Wisdom iii. 1-3.

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- 16 *should be killed. And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right*
17 *hand, or upon their forehead; and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name.*
18 *Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six.*

Whilst we cannot divide the single mystery represented by the dragon and the two beasts, we can see that each one of them displays a special aspect of the operation of evil. The primary act of the dragon is that of rebellion against God; and the two beasts are his ministers and willing servants. The beast from the sea symbolises the spirit of Antichrist, of blasphemy, of worldly power disregarding the claims and the laws of God. The beast from the land, on the other hand, exercises his power in the spiritual realm; he is the devil's advocate of false religion, the corrupter of revealed truth.

Our Lord had said that 'there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders'; and if the first beast symbolises the 'false Christs' whom St. John collectively designates as Antichrist, the second beast may represent those 'false prophets' who, if it were possible, will deceive even the elect. We shall see that the second beast is plainly to be identified with the 'false prophet' who appears in later visions.

Hence, it seems a just parallelism to describe the second beast as a parody of the Holy Spirit. It is the blessed mission of the Holy Spirit in the world to make effective the redemptive sacrifice of Calvary and to lead the elect

people of Christ into all truth. The second beast has 'two horns like unto a lamb',—that is, he bears an insidious likeness to a true witness of Christ. But he speaks the evil things of his master, the dragon; and by casting the flavour of a diluted and corrupt religion over the ideals of the world, he invests worldliness with an aura of false spirituality,—he gives breath to the image of the first beast. Wherever any purely human ideal or any political or social philosophy is exalted to the place of religion, there we see the worship of the first beast's image and the powerful operation for evil of the beast from the land.

He exercises spectacular powers. From time to time in her history the Church has allowed her witness to be corrupted by his influence, encouraging the world by high-sounding exhortations, using the rhetoric of a false piety to condone the idolatry of state-worship or nation-worship or of a vague humanitarianism. Thus is freedom destroyed; the action of the beast is necessarily accompanied by tyranny, by the proscription, ostracism and ruthless suppression of all who refuse to receive his mark. Political tyranny is the inevitable sequel to the decay of religion.

Endless discussion has centred on the mystery of the number 666. It is quite out of keeping with the dignity and solemnity of the narrative to suppose that St. John interposes an ingenious conundrum on which his readers might exercise their wits and curiosity. It seems, therefore, quite inappropriate to juggle with figures and letters, as with a cipher, and to try to identify the beast with some particular historical character. Many attempts of this kind have been made; perhaps the most plausible is that of Richard of St. Victor, who, giving numerical equivalents to the letters of the Greek alphabet, concludes that the number 666 signifies 'the adversary'.¹

¹*In Apoc. Joannis*, iv, 5; Migne, *P.L.*, cxcvi, 808.

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But we cannot regard any such interpretation as satisfactory, still less as final; though we admit that the real significance of the number is extremely difficult to discover. We may observe that throughout the Apocalypse,—as in the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet and the sixth bowl,—the number 6 seems to be associated with the extremity of evil. We may recall that it was at the sixth hour of the sixth day that the Son of God was nailed upon the Cross. Perhaps, therefore, the number 666 is intended to suggest the highest intensification of evil, the uttermost depth of the mystery of iniquity.

(5) THE LAMB ON MOUNT ZION AND THE PREPARATION OF THE HARVEST

XIV

- 1 *And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father,*
- 2 *written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as*
- 3 *the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out*
- 4 *of the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the firstfruits unto*
- 5 *God and unto the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish.*
- 6 *And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having an eternal gospel to proclaim unto them that dwell*

- on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and
 7 tongue and people; and he saith with a great voice,
*Fear God, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgement is come: and worship him that made the heaven
 and the earth and sea and fountains of waters.*
- 8 *And another, a second angel, followed, saying,
 Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which hath made
 all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her
 fornication.*
- 9 *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying
 with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast
 and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead,
 10 or upon his hand, he also shall drink of the wine of
 the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the
 cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire
 and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and
 11 in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their
 torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no
 rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his
 image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name.*
- 12 *Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the
 commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*
- 13 *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write,
 Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from hence-
 forth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from
 their labours; for their works follow with them.*

The two previous chapters have been concerned primarily with the mystery of evil; St. John now records two visions which deal, respectively, with the mystery of redemption and with the unfolding of that mystery to the world. The central theme of both visions is the proclamation of the eternal Gospel to all the peoples of the earth.

In the first (vv. 1-13) our Lord is seen, in the midst of

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His elect people, under the figure of the Lamb of God standing upon the holy mountain of Zion. In the second (vv. 14-20) He is displayed as seated upon a white cloud, crowned in majesty, and holding in His hand the sharp sickle of the harvester. In each case three angels follow to proclaim His will and to herald the message of His salvation.

It is clear that the company of the hundred and forty-four thousand is the same as the sealed multitude of chapter VII; and hence, that these blessed souls are to be identified with the Two Witnesses of chapter XI and with the man-child of chapter XII. They represent the true worshippers of Christ, the elect people of God, those who have 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'. With the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures they join in the strains of that 'new song' which St. John had already heard in the adoration of the Lamb. None but those consecrated to God's service may learn this song; just as none but those receiving the 'new name' of the divine election could know that name or understand its meaning.

The reference to the virginity of the blessed company of the faithful is to be interpreted in a spiritual sense. Throughout the book virginity represents purity of faith, just as fornication symbolises the restless and wanton seeking after false gods. We shall see that the climax of the book's teaching is reached in the contrast between Babylon and the New Jerusalem, between the Harlot and the Bride; and this central idea is alluded to and developed as the visions proceed.

It may appear, at a first reading, that this vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion refers essentially to the future life; and there is, beyond question, a sense in which that is true. But the Church of the faithful is always one. Its

members, whether they still live in the world or have passed beyond, are one society. They are all citizens of the New Jerusalem which came down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband on the first day of Pentecost. Thus, we must not interpret this vision as speaking to us exclusively of 'the things to come'. It relates also to 'the things which are'; it is in this world that every Christian is called to 'follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth',—we are already, by the grace of God, 'purchased from among men to be the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb'. And by that divine act of choice we are made possessors of the truth and cleansed from the stain of sin.

'Ye *are come* unto Mount Zion,' declared St. Paul, 'and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.'¹

The three angels going forth in the midst of heaven shew the proclamation of the Gospel of redemption and the varying manner of its reception by the world. We are reminded of the parable of the sower. Only a part of the seed fell on good ground; some of it was choked and stifled before it could mature, and some was devoured before it could even germinate. Here, then, are the three things,—true religion, false religion, and no religion; and upon them, each in turn, the three angels declare the divine sentence.

The first angel announces the preaching of the eternal Gospel and calls upon those who receive it faithfully to worship God with a holy fear. The second proclaims the verdict of doom upon that corrupt religion so frequently symbolised in the Apocalypse under the figure of fornication. Babylon is here mentioned for the first time, but the

¹Hebrews xii. 22, 23.

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seer passes on without comment or explanation; and it is not until we come to the great visions of chapters XVII and XVIII that we shall see the full significance of the symbol. Babylon, as we shall then see her delineated, represents the degenerate, faithless Church, the Church corrupted, which 'hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication'.

The third angel records the judgment that rests on those who have deliberately taken Satan for their master in thought and in act. We may note that a mark on the forehead signifies a character given to all thoughts, as a mark on the hand applies to all actions. We may also observe that the words translated 'for ever and ever' are better rendered 'unto the ages of the ages',—that is, until the final consummation of the times.

It seems, then, that we should do wrong to interpret these verses as referring to the torments of final damnation. The implication is rather that the deliberate choosing of the world's idols, the deliberate effort to find satisfaction in the enticements and pleasures and seductions of the world, can only lead to bitter disillusionment and, in the last resort, to despair. The world's attractions afford no resting-place for the soul; and yet, when a man has become hardened and spiritually anaesthetised by careless disregard of divine things, the mere presence of sanctity, in thing or in person, provokes and tortures him. He is repelled, yet fascinated by the Church; even the sight of a priest in the street or of a devotional book on someone's bookshelf may move him to violent and irrational disgust. This is one sense in which those who have received the mark of the beast are tormented in the presence of the Lamb and know no rest day or night.

The vision closes with an affirmation of the secure peace of heart that is the portion of the true believers, and with

the benediction upon those 'who die in the Lord from henceforth',—the second of the seven benedictions contained in the book. It is to be understood of that death to the world, that new birth in Christ, which, in the mercy of God, belong to our state in this world, though fulfilment is delayed until the day of final resurrection.

XIV

14 *And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap*
 15 *is come; for the harvest of the earth is over-ripe. And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth; and the earth was reaped.*

17 *And another angel came out from the temple which*
 18 *is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over fire; and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the wine of the earth; for her*
 19 *grapes are fully ripe. And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress, of the*
 20 *wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*

The seer looks up again and beholds the figure of the Son of Man, seated upon a white cloud, crowned in majesty and having in His hand the sharp sickle of the harvester.

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The glorified Redeemer makes ready to complete His work of deliverance and salvation. The three angels who come forth as heralds of His will, appear from the innermost shrine of the temple and from the holy altar itself, thus shewing that the saving mission of the Son of God is to be accomplished in the world by the witness and ministry of the Catholic Church. It is possible that the harvest refers to the good, whilst the vintage speaks of the evil. In any case, we must be clear that this vision is not predictive of the final day of judgment. All is still happening in this world and within the Christian age.

Perhaps the third angel, 'he that hath power over fire,' symbolises the Holy Spirit, purifying the souls of men by His sacred flame. This suggestion seems to find support in the strange imagery of the last verse; for 40 is the number which signifies purification (here multiplied by itself to express emphasis and completeness), and the 'blood from the winepress' symbolises the passions of unregenerate human nature. We may also note that the winepress was trodden outside the city; for nothing unsanctified may enter within its walls.

It needs to be repeated that the harvest of this vision is not the harvest of the last judgment, but that of the 'eternal Gospel' in its propagation throughout the world. It is the harvest of which our Lord spoke when He compared the Kingdom of heaven to a man casting his seed upon the ground,—and 'when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come';¹ and of which again He said, 'Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.'²

Hence, we may see the mission of the third angel as representing the action of the Holy Spirit, purifying and

¹Mark iv. 29.

²John iv. 35.

preparing men's hearts so that the seed of the Gospel may be fruitful in their lives. And, again, we may see an allusion to the purifying fire of purgatory,—those fires of divine love in which the soul is made ready for the consummation of all its desires in the beatific vision. Thus interpreted, the whole of this chapter is seen as a message of encouragement and consolation; and the close parallelism of its two parts is made fully manifest.

(6) THE SEVEN GOLDEN BOWLS

XV

- 1 *And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having seven plagues, which are the last, for in them is finished the wrath of God.*
- 2 *And I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire; and them that come victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing*
- 3 *by the glassy sea, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy*
- 4 *ways, thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest.*
- 5 *And after these things I saw, and the temple of the*
- 6 *tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, arrayed with precious stone, pure and bright, and girt about their breasts with*
- 7 *golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden bowls full of*
- 8 *the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of*

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God, and from his power; and none was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels should be finished.

It is striking that the seven last plagues, in which the wrath of God is 'finished', are introduced by a vision of joy and triumph in the court of heaven. Once again we hear the song of the redeemed as they stand upon the crystal sea before the throne of God,—a triumphant *Gloria in excelsis* which links up the whole dramatic action with the celebration of the heavenly liturgy and the mystery of man's redemption.

God's wrath may be 'finished'—that is, fully accomplished and satisfied; of His mercy there are no bounds or limits. All is embraced within His sovereign love; all calamity, suffering and affliction are included within His saving purposes. His judgments are the ratification of the prayers of the saints, the expressions of His will for the world's salvation. 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.'¹

This is a hard lesson. In times of trial and catastrophe, in times when wickedness seems to be spreading like an epidemic, infecting the whole world, and when men appear possessed of supernatural powers of evil, how can we distinguish between the sin of man and the judgment of God? Out of evil upon so terrible a scale, how can good come?

These questions have exercised the minds of good men through the centuries. The prophets of the Old Testament showed clearly where the true answer was to be sought; and the Christian Gospel ratified and fulfilled that answer. Here, in this vision of the Apocalypse, we are to

¹Romans viii. 18.

note that the seven last plagues proceed, not (as we might perhaps expect) from the pit of the abyss nor from the foul exhalations of the dragon, but from the innermost sanctuary of the temple of God in heaven. They are heralded by seven angels robed in the full insignia of the priesthood; they are a necessary part of God's plan for the redemption of mankind. Man's true destiny cannot be achieved until the mystery of evil has been worked out.

It is for us to discern the judgments of God in the courses of the world. But it is not for us to seek to understand the mysteries of His providence; we cannot 'enter into the temple'. 'None can enter,' says Richard of St. Victor, 'because not even the saints can fully know the hidden things of divine judgment in this present life.'¹

XVI

- 1 *And I heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, Go ye, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.*
- 2 *And the first went, and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and which worshipped his image.*
- 3 *And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living soul died, even the things that were in the sea.*
- 4 *And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and*
- 5 *the fountains of the waters; and it became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Righteous art thou, which art and which wast, thou Holy One, be-*
- 6 *cause thou didst thus judge: for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast thou given*
- 7 *them to drink: they are worthy. And I heard the altar*

¹*In Apoc. Joannis*, v, 2; Migne, *P.L.* cxcvi, 823.

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saying, Yea, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgements.

- 8 *And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun;*
9 *and it was given unto it to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat: and they blasphemed the name of the God which hath the power over these plagues; and they repented not to give him glory.*

The vision of the Bowls forms the sixth section in this central part of the book and thus corresponds, in the symmetrical grouping of its seven components, with the second section, the vision of the Trumpets. We should therefore expect to find a parallelism between the two series; and, as the following table shews, there is a close correspondence between them.

<i>Trumpets</i>	<i>Bowls</i>
i. The earth.	i. The earth.
ii. The sea.	ii. The sea.
iii. Rivers and fountains.	iii. Rivers and fountains.
iv. Sun, moon and stars.	iv. The sun.
v. The pit of the abyss.	v. The throne of the beast.
vi. The River Euphrates.	vi. The River Euphrates.
vii. Great voices in heaven; lightnings, voices, thunders, hail and a great earthquake.	vii. A great voice from the throne; lightnings, voices, thunders, a great earthquake, the division of Babylon and great hail.

From the structural likeness between the two series it seems reasonable to conclude that some of the considerations which we applied to the interpretation of the Trumpet visions will apply equally to the Bowls. Thus, it appears certain that the Bowls are not to be regarded as

successive in time to the Trumpets; on the contrary, the two series are, as it were, in parallel. The Bowls, like the Trumpets, embrace the whole span of the Christian era. We are to see the operation of certain principles, certain movements of the divine providence, which govern human life as a whole and are illustrated continually in the history of the Church and the world, as also in the life of the individual.

Now the series of the Trumpets, as we saw, had relation to what may be called the external history of the Church, —to the general conditions under which her mission is to be fulfilled, and the effects of the world's inevitable hostility. By contrast, the Bowls seem to refer to the Church's internal history; especially they shew how retribution falls upon the false religion by which her witness has been corrupted through the ages.

That the visions of the Bowls deal with the Church and not with the world seems assured by the manner in which they are introduced. The Bowls themselves, out of which the wrath of God is poured, are those golden vessels in which the incense, after being kindled in the court of the Temple, was carried into the inner sanctuary to be offered upon the altar. They are, therefore, intimately concerned with the most sacred parts of the Temple worship.

Again, the seven angels who come forth as ministers of the divine judgment appear from the same inner sanctuary, robed in the vestments of the priesthood. The smoke which fills the holy place recalls the great vision of Isaiah when, caught up into the presence of the Lord, he heard the chant of the *Tersanctus*, whose strains are echoed in every enactment of the Mass throughout the Christian world.

It is St. Paul who gives us the keynote to the interpretation of the visions of the Seven Bowls. 'For the wrath of

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God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, *who hold the truth in unrighteousness*. . . . Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but . . . changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.¹

There is the very spirit of false religion,—the religion of compromise, accommodation and hypocrisy,—which is the special characteristic of the Harlot Church. Upon this corruption of the true faith the wrath of God is poured out,—not in the anger of vindictiveness, but in the severity of absolute justice. It is man's rebellion against God's justice, his refusal of God's mercy, that brings upon him the 'seven last plagues' of these visions.

What St. John seems here to be teaching us is that the degradation or prostitution of sacred things is the most evil thing in the world. Nothing so surely poisons the life of society or destroys the health of the individual soul as a corrupted religion. 'How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.'²

The earth upon which the first bowl is poured out symbolises the world in St. John's sense of the term,—not the world as opposed to the Church, but the spirit of worldliness, from whose infection Christians are by no means immune. It destroys the very possibility of true penitence, removes all interior peace from the soul and leads, at best, to a disillusionment and remorse that fret and torment a man's whole being like a sore upon the body.

The sea represents the wilfulness of unregenerate humanity; and it may be that the judgment of the second bowl refers to careless and profane use of the Sacraments. The Christian soul in a state of grace is sustained and kept

¹Romans i. 18-25.

²Isaiah i. 21.

alive by the sacred mysteries of the Church's dispensation. But wherever the Sacraments are not duly honoured and venerated, the result, both in the individual soul and in the community, is spiritual death.

In like manner, the teachings and guidance of the Holy Spirit (symbolised by 'rivers and fountains') cannot be fruitful unless they are received in union with the living activity of the Church. They must be received in humility and holy fear; otherwise their efficacy will be perverted by the pride and wilfulness that are in man. Hence may arise false doctrine, which in turn breeds conflict and hatred; so that Christ is crucified afresh in His members. Saints and prophets will be persecuted by those of their own household; the innocent will suffer with the guilty; no conflict is so bitter as that occasioned by the corruption of religious truth. All the sectarian disputes and the wars of religion that have defiled Christian history, all the narrowness and intolerance that Christian men have displayed in these conflicts, are foreshadowed under this judgment of the third bowl.

The sun of the fourth bowl represents Christ, the light of the world. But in a divided and degenerate Church He is seen as a consuming fire whose flame scorches the souls of men. Yet there is no sign of penitence, but only a deepening of evil and a more reckless profanity.

XVI

10 *And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom was darkened; and they*
 11 *gnawed their tongues for pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their works.*

12 *And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the river Euphrates; and the water thereof was*

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dried up, that the way might be made ready for the
13 kings that come from the sunrising. And I saw coming
out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of
the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet,
14 three unclean spirits, as it were frogs: for they are
spirits of devils, working signs; which go forth unto the
kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto
15 the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Behold,
I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and
keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see
16 his shame.) And they gathered them together into the
place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.
17 And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air; and
there came forth a great voice out of the temple, from
18 the throne, saying, It is done: and there were lightnings,
and voices, and thunders; and there was a great earth-
quake, such as was not since there were men upon the
19 earth, so great an earthquake, so mighty. And the great
city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the
nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in
the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of
20 the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away,
21 and the mountains were not found. And great hail,
every stone about the weight of a talent, cometh down
out of heaven upon men: and men blasphemed God be-
cause of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof is
exceeding great.

The visions of judgment proceed. Those who have refused the light are thereby plunged into a terrible darkness of the spirit,—despairing and without the will to turn towards God. Yet such is the frenzy of their despair that they only boast the more confidently of their self-sufficiency.

The consummation of the cycle of evil approaches. It may be that the river Euphrates, the river upon which Babylon stands, symbolises precisely this intellectual self-sufficiency, this pride of the mind, which can only culminate in the loss of divine truth and in apostasy. The waters of this river are now dried up; the intellect, elevated to a sovereignty which does not belong to it, breaks down in ruin. It is the end of every dissolvent movement that has, through the ages, weakened the supernatural witness of the Church; and if we wanted a contemporary illustration, we might consider the manifest bankruptcy to-day of what is called 'liberal theology'. More than once in its history the Church has nearly died of broad-mindedness.

The wheel has nearly come full circle. 'The kings that come from the sunrising' represent, under yet another figure, the faithful remnant by whom the lamp of witness will be handed on. The first signs of the new dawn are to be discerned. But in the meantime, in the prevailing darkness, strange and horrible things appear. It is in the ages of exhausted rationalism that superstition has always flourished most luxuriantly. And it may be that some fearful wave of superstitious practice will be one of the preludes to the ending of the times.

There seems to have been no such actual place as Har Magedon. The meaning is 'the mountain of Megiddo'; and as Megiddo was the scene of more than one great Israelite victory, the name is perhaps symbolic of the triumph of righteousness and justice in the ultimate conflict.

The seventh bowl carries us on to the consummation of the world, with the accompaniment of portents in the heavens and upon earth; it is possible that the 'great earthquake' represents political upheaval and revolution. The

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city of Babylon, which is the Catholic Church in her worldliness and degeneracy, is called in remembrance before God for the final separation of the truth from falsehood, of good from evil, of integrity from corruption. Yet even in this final stage there is no suggestion of penitence or conversion; the opportunity for that is past.

We may say of the judgments of the Bowls that, like the Trumpets, they refer to the whole Christian age from the Incarnation to the Second Coming. But there is also a sense in which the succession of 'plagues' has been worked out time and again in the internal history of the Church. Moreover, the visions cast a searching light upon the individual life of the Christian soul, displaying for our warning and admonition the terrible slope of spiritual ruin down which each one of us may be led by temptation and the disregard of God's guidance.

But we must also insist that the line of interpretation here suggested is only one of many that might be followed. There are inexhaustible depths of meaning in these visions, and no commentator may presume to say that he has understood them in any final or exclusive sense. 'I must confess myself entirely ignorant,' declares St. Augustine in discussing a part of the teaching of the Apocalypse; 'I will only mention the suspicions of which I have heard or read.' It is in this mood of caution and reverence that any study of these sacred writings must be undertaken.

(7) THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON

XVII

- 1 *And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the judgement of the great harlot that*
- 2 *sitteth upon many waters; with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the*

earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication. And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication, and upon her forehead a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF THE HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

There have already been two references to Babylon,—the one in the vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion and the other in the judgment of the seventh Golden Bowl. In the first her doom was pronounced because ‘she hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’;¹ in the second it was declared that, in the time appointed, she was to be ‘remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath’.² These judgments are now to be rehearsed in their fulness.

The vision of the Woman of Mystery, ‘Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots,’ in this chapter invites immediate comparison with the vision of the Woman and the Dragon in chapter XII. Though the two women are contrasted in every particular, yet in a mystical sense they are one and the same. The true Church and the false Church are not separate societies, but the same society;

¹xiv. 8.²xvi. 19.

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each is the mystical counterpart of the other. Thus, we observe that the Harlot and the Woman arrayed with the Sun are both found in the wilderness,—in the place of trial and temptation which is the spiritual habitation of the Church in the world.

Again, consider these two verses:

‘And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the judgement of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters.’¹

‘And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’²

The parallelism is striking: These two visions,—of the judgment of Babylon and of the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem,—both proceed out of the judgments of the seven bowls, which, as we have seen, were concerned especially with the internal life of the Church. The assumption is that they display different aspects of the same mystery.

In the Old Testament the figure of fornication is never used of a heathen kingdom. It is a symbol, not of political tyranny or misrule, but of religious faithlessness. Hence, we find difficulty in believing that the Babylon of the Apocalypse represents the city or the empire of Rome, or any worldly kingdom. This question has been endlessly debated; and to discuss it fully would carry us far beyond the reasonable limits of these short notes. But it does seem clear, when all the evidence has been weighed, that the harlot city of Babylon does not symbolise, in general or particular, the pride and violence of worldly power, but the wantonness of corrupt religion. Here, then, is the anti-

¹xvii. 1.

²xxi. 9.

thesis. The Catholic Church is at once the Harlot and the Bride, Babylon and the New Jerusalem. And although one of the major themes of the Apocalypse is the contrast between true religion and false, yet the boundary between the two cities is not a visible or external one. It is to be apprehended spiritually. The wheat and the tares must grow together until the harvest; the judgment and separation between them belong, not to man, but to God.

Once this point is apprehended, the symbolism of the early part of the vision becomes fairly easy to follow and interpret. The woman is revealed 'sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, having seven heads and ten horns' and we need have no doubt in identifying this beast with the beast from the sea of chapter XIII. Bede makes the suggestion that the seven heads and ten horns are parallel or repetitive figures indicating the universal extent of the beast's influence in the last days.

For the beast, as we have seen, represents the kingdom of Antichrist; and the woman is displayed riding upon him,—that is, guiding and controlling him. She is clothed in purple and scarlet. The gold and jewels that she wears are the wages of her degradation,—the expensive finery of the shameless prostitute. She holds a golden cup filled with the wine of her seductions and idolatries; as it is written, 'Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand, that made all the earth drunken; the nations have drunken of her wine.'¹

'And who', asks St. John of the Cross, 'drinks not, either much or little, from this golden chalice of the Babylonian woman of the Apocalypse? She seated herself on that great beast, that had seven heads and ten crowns, signifying that there is scarce any man, whether high or low, saint or sinner, who comes not to drink of her wine,

¹Jeremiah li. 7.

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to some extent enslaving his heart thereby; for, as is said of her in that place, all the kings of the earth have become drunken with the wine of her prostitution. And she seizes upon all estates of men, even upon the highest and the noblest estate,—the service of the sanctuary and the divine priesthood,—setting her abominable cup, as Daniel says, in the holy place and leaving scarcely a single strong man without making him to drink, either little or much, from the wine of this chalice.’¹

Her name expresses the full and mysterious depth of her iniquity. The blood of the saints,—that is, the suffering and steadfastness in affliction of the true witnesses of Jesus,—inebriates her. She flaunts herself before the world the more recklessly, boasting a kinship with, and a hypocritical admiration for, His faithful followers. And before this mystery St. John is bewildered as by some vile apparition, by the vision of a level of evil which he had never contemplated,—the corruption and poison of religion gone bad.

XVII

7 *And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven*
8 *heads and the ten horns. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition. And they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was,*
9 *and is not, and shall come. Here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on*
10 *which the woman sitteth: and they are seven kings; the*

¹*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, III, 22, iv.

- five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and and when he cometh, he must continue a little while.*
- 11 *And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is of the seven; and he goeth into perdition.*
- 12 *And the ten horns that thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but they receive*
- 13 *authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority*
- 14 *unto the beast. These shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings; and they also shall overcome that*
- 15 *are with him, called and chosen and faithful. And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations,*
- 16 *and tongues. And the ten horns which thou sawest, and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and*
- 17 *shall burn her utterly with fire. For God did put in their hearts to do his mind, and to come to one mind, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of*
- 18 *God should be accomplished. And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

There seems no good reason to think that the numbers and references in these verses are to be understood literally. Nothing is to be gained by trying to juggle with the names of the first-century Roman emperors or with the succession of the great empires (Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and the rest) of the pre-Christian past. Throughout the Apocalypse numbers are used symbolically. It would be strange that we should suddenly be confronted with a single passage in which a totally different method of interpretation is to be applied.

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It is of the beast rather than of the harlot that the angel first speaks. 'The beast that thou sawest was and is not; and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into perdition.' Compare the words of our Lord in the first vision of the book: 'I am the first and the last and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.'¹ The first passage is a parody of the second; the beast is a living parody of the living Christ. And therefore he excites the wonder and admiration of the godless world; for, as the mind of Christ is in His elect people, so the mind of Antichrist, which is especially connected with apostasy from the truth, dominates the reprobate world. No enemy is more bitter than he who was once a friend. The Church's most relentless foes have always been those who, like Judas Iscariot, 'went out from us, but they were not of us.'²

There are probable allusions in these verses to the fall of Jerusalem and to the first-century persecutions of the Church; but the meaning of the vision goes beyond local or temporal circumstances. The 'seven mountains on which the woman sitteth' may suggest that, in spite of all, she exercises her power only by the permissive will of God; even her evil operation falls within the framework of His superintending providence. Moreover, the number 7, as St. Augustine puts it, signifies 'the totality of the one Church';³ and we are reminded of the mystical identity of Babylon with the heavenly Jerusalem. Both are figures of the universal Church.

And perhaps, in the reference to the seven kings of whom 'five are fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come', and to the succeeding reign of the beast and of the ten kings, we are taken back to the sequence of thought outlined in the judgments of the bowls. The allusion may be

¹i. 18.

²1 John ii. 19.

³*De Civ. Dei*, xvii, 4.

to the progressive deepening of evil and its culmination in the apostasy of the kingdom of Antichrist. The five kings who are fallen may correspond to the first five bowls, the king who now is to the sixth bowl, and he who is to come to the seventh. The progression reaches its climax in the almost universal apostasy which marks the reign of the beast; and the ten kings who receive their power with him and support him in the exercise of their authority symbolise the very universality of his reign.

The angel concludes with the assurance that the final victory will be with the holy Lamb of God and with those followers of His who are 'called and chosen and faithful',—those who, predestined to share His kingdom, have responded to His call and served Him stedfastly.

And then, in a kind of afterthought, we have a striking judgment on the retribution that, in this world, falls upon the harlot religion of Babylon. There comes a stage when the corruption, lethargy and hypocrisy of a degenerate religion begin to excite the disgust and contempt even of the world. The civil power, jealous of the wealth of the faithless Church and justly angered by the futility of her witness and the hollowness of her professions, falls upon her to strip her of her finery and to purify her in the fire of persecution. Thus is the will of God fulfilled and thus is Babylon, the city of confusion, brought low. When the Church has become so sunk in sloth and corruption that she has lost the power to reform herself, then God makes use of the world to cleanse her; and so the way of regeneration is prepared.

XVIII

- 1 *After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth*
- 2 *was lightened with his glory. And he cried with a mighty*

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voice, saying, *Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of devils, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful*
3 *bird. For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.*
4 *And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her*
5 *plagues: for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Render unto her even as she rendered, and double unto her the double according to her works: in the cup which she*
7 *mingled, mingle unto her double. How much soever she glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see*
8 *mourning. Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God which judged her.*

‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.’ Already we have heard these terrible words. They came upon our ears like a warning rumble of thunder in the vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion; and in all that has followed we have been aware of the gathering of the storm-clouds,—we have had the sense of approaching climax and the imminence of doom. The vision of the seventh bowl heralded the consummation of the times when ‘Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God’. There followed the revealing of the mystery of her iniquity and the enunciation of her coming destruction. And now God’s

judgment upon the harlot city is to be fulfilled to the uttermost.

‘Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east . . . and the earth shined with his glory.’¹ It seems clear that the angel whom St. John beholds ‘coming down out of heaven, having great authority,’ represents our Lord; of no other could it be said that ‘the earth was lightened with his glory’. There is here a foreshadowing of His final coming to judge the world; but in another sense this appearance of His belongs to every moment of time, just as the judgment of Babylon is being fulfilled from day to day in the life of the Church and in the soul of each individual Christian. ‘This is the judgment, that the light is come into the world and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.’² The light is of Christ and of the new Jerusalem, His bride; the darkness is of the faithless and fickle Babylon.

The fall of Babylon is to be understood spiritually; it is a fall from grace and integrity, an utter failure in witness. It is a thing that has already taken place. Babylon has fallen,—hopelessly and irremediably,—and the time of her judgment is at hand. The kingdom of heaven had been likened to a great mustard tree in whose branches the birds of the air found shelter. But the faithless Church can be compared only with a cage or prison, the haunt of ‘every unclean and hateful bird’, wherein the souls of men are assaulted and devoured by the agencies of evil, and wherein all freedom of the spirit has been lost.

And this has happened because she has, like a harlot, prostituted herself to the world. She has solicited and dragged down to spiritual ruin the wealthy and the powerful; and men have grown rich by pandering to her avarice.

Therefore, at last, the call is sounded, as it had been

¹Ezekiel xliiii. 2.

²John iii. 19.

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sounded in the days of the prophets: 'Flee out of the midst of Babylon and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance.'¹ Come forth from this prison-house of the spirit, from the suffocating atmosphere of a sensual and degraded religion. Let it be noted once again that Jerusalem and Babylon, the true Church and the false, are not separate societies; they are mystically one and the same. That the elect people are now called to come out of the midst of Babylon shows that, up to this time, they had been within her.

In this sense the vision is undoubtedly prophetic of the separation of the wheat from the tares, and of final judgment. We are never allowed to lose sight of those primary mysteries of our faith,—the mystery of election, the mystery of redemption and the mystery of judgment,—with which the teaching of the Apocalypse is chiefly concerned. Perhaps also we may see a direct historical reference to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies and the subsequent departure of the Christian community to the neighbouring town of Pella.

But no one mode of interpretation is exclusive or complete. Certainly we must look also for the application of these visions and judgments to the circumstances of our own lives. Such is the wealth of divine wisdom contained in the book that its teaching relates as much to the life of the individual soul as to the mysteries of God's providence in the courses of the world. Indeed, the whole book might be treated as a manual of spiritual instruction, shewing the course of the soul's pilgrimage through the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive ways of the interior life to the final ascent of Mount Zion and the vision of peace in the heavenly Jerusalem. An interpretation on these lines

¹Jeremiah li. 6.

could be fully worked out only by one who had himself trodden those paths, who had himself passed through the dark nights of the ascent and glimpsed the full sunlight of the mountain-top. But for every Christian there is, in these visions, abundance of admonition, encouragement and guidance, to strengthen him against temptation and to guide his feet in the ways of salvation.

Thus, the call: 'Come forth, my people, out of her,' is an ever-present summons which we disregard at our peril. God forbid that anyone should conclude that it could ever be right to sever himself from the holy Church of God. That is not the point at all. We are to realise that everything that makes religion easy and comfortable, everything that tempts us to put the consolations of our faith before its duties, everything that fosters complacency and self-indulgence in our spiritual lives, everything that helps us to accommodate the practice of our religion to the demands of the world,—all these things are of Babylon. From them we are to 'come out'; for we are all citizens of Babylon, 'the mother of the harlots and of the abominations of the earth'.

The two cities of Jerusalem and Babylon, as St. Augustine tells us,—'are mingled together, at the end to be severed. And from this temporal mingling it comes to pass that some men belonging to Babylon order the things of Jerusalem, and some belonging to Jerusalem order the things of Babylon. . . . All who mind earthly things, who choose earthly happiness before God, who seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's, belong to that one city which is mystically called Babylon.'¹

The command to 'render unto her even as she rendered and double unto her the double according to her works' is addressed to those who had obeyed the injunction to come

¹*Enarr. in Ps. lxii.*

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forth from the doomed city, lest they should be infected by her plagues. We must not see in these words any crude ideas of vindictiveness or a spirit of revenge. They are to be understood, surely, as a summons to the faithful to recognise the true nature of the city's contamination and the justice of the doom that is to fall upon her. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,' the prophet of old had cried, 'speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.'¹ Sin has brought its own retribution,—a bitter draught which is a double mingling of the cup of God's wrath. But this retribution is not an anticipation of final doom, for the way of repentance is still open.

'The soul', says St. John of the Cross, 'is wearied and fatigued by its desires and by indulgence in them, since they all cause it the greater emptiness and hunger. . . . The greater are the desires which possess the soul, the greater are its torments; for in such a soul is fulfilled, even in this life, that which is said in the Apocalypse concerning Babylon, "How much soever she glorified herself and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning."'²

In the flush of her wealth and prosperity the harlot city has no sense of these things. She boasts of her regal sway over the hearts of those whom she has reduced. She is careless of the loss of the true riches of the spirit. Like the Church at Laodicea she thinks that all is well with her and that she has need of nothing; she knows not that she is 'the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked'. She is even unaware that the Bridegroom is no longer in her midst,—'I am no widow and shall in no wise see mourning.' This boast shews how completely she has blinded herself to her true state; for 'she that is a widow

¹Isaiah xl. 1, 2.

²*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I, 7, ii.

indeed and desolate, hath her hope set on God and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day'.¹

The mention of 'death and mourning and famine' recalls our minds to the visions of the seals and the going forth of the red, the black and the pale horses. Let us note, too, that the destruction of the city will be no gradual process, but a sudden catastrophe, occurring without warning and accomplished 'in one day'. All through the Scriptures, and especially, perhaps, in the Gospels we are warned of the suddenness with which God's judgment falls upon sin. It may be delayed; but when it comes, it comes swiftly and without warning.

There are several passages in the Old Testament wherein burning with fire is spoken of as the fitting punishment of fornication. In the Apocalypse, as we have seen, fornication is always understood in a spiritual sense, as signifying religious faithlessness; and in the same way, the fire that is to consume Babylon is a spiritual fire,—a flame by which the Church in her corruption is cleansed and purified. There seems to be no suggestion here of final judgment. The putrefaction of religion brings its own retribution, both upon the Church and upon society as a whole; that is the meaning of the doom of Babylon. Only upon the charred and blackened ruins of her utter desolation can the walls of the New Jerusalem arise.

XVIII

- 9 *And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning,*
 10 *standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying,*
Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city!
 11 *for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the mer-*

¹ Timothy v. 5.

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*chants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no
12 man buyeth their merchandise any more; merchandise
of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and
fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all
thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel
made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron,
13 and marble; and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and
ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine
flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep; and merchan-
dise of horses and chariots and slaves; and souls of men.
14 And the fruits which thy soul lusted after are gone
from thee, and all things that were dainty and sumptu-
ous are perished from thee, and men shall find them no
15 more at all. The merchants of these things, who were
made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of
16 her torment, weeping and mourning; saying, Woe, woe,
the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and
purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious
17 stone and pearl! For in one hour so great riches is
made desolate. And every shipmaster, and every one
that saileth any whither, and mariners, and as many
18 as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, and cried
out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, say-
19 ing, What city is like the great city? And they cast
dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning,
saying, Woe, woe, the great city, wherein were made
rich all that had their ships in the sea by reason of her
20 costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate. Rejoice
over her, thou heaven, and ye saints, and ye apostles, and
ye prophets; for God hath judged your judgement on her.*

The solemn beauty of these verses is irresistible. Few passages in the world's literature convey so profound a sense of grief and mourning as this lament of the world

over the harlot city. The description is of Tyre rather than of Babylon, and recalls the tremendous chapters in Isaiah and Ezekiel in which the doom of that great maritime city is pronounced. Thus we are to see that no one city,—neither Rome nor Babylon nor Tyre nor Jerusalem,—is spoken of in this vision; it is the corruption of Christ's visible kingdom upon which retribution is to fall and over which the world pours out its sorrow.

For to the world Babylon had been an all too faithful mistress. In return for gold and every kind of precious thing, she had given herself unstintingly to the world; she had trafficked not only in material articles of commerce, but in the bodies and souls of men. And, in the words of Isaac Williams, 'all these things which are so minutely particularised, as expressive of the meshes of that net by which men's souls are taken, have also their place in the new Jerusalem, where every jewel is specified by name, and the gold of its streets and the fine linen and the incense and the wine and the oil, its white horses also. In both alike must they stand for spiritual merchandise of good and evil. Upon the false riches, so manifold in their variety and extent, is the judgment; riches are mentioned, without any allusion to further sin than selfish possession.'¹

'And the fruits which thy soul lusted after are gone from thee.' There is the full bitterness of disillusionment. Let it be noted that the three classes of men,—the kings, the merchants and the mariners,—who weep and mourn over the doomed city, all of them stand afar off 'for the fear of her torment'. They are not involved in her destruction; nor yet are those faithful souls who have obeyed the angelic summons to come out of her. The doom is upon those who have allowed the holy place to become the house of merchandise, who have made themselves partners of

¹*The Apocalypse*, p. 374.

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the city's idolatry and, on her behalf, solicited the world's attention and flattery. These are they who have acted as accessories of her harlotry; upon them the destruction must fall.

The doom of the 'city of confusion' has been executed time and again in the history of the Church on earth. Time and again the 'kings' and 'merchants' and 'mariners' have declared with sorrow and mourning that the Church in her corruption is doomed beyond hope of recovery; time and again Babylon has fallen and the New Jerusalem has come down from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. Therefore may the saints rejoice in the divine assurance of regeneration, since against God's Church the gates of hell cannot prevail. And, as Chesterton reminds us, we can say to-day what has been said many times by Christian men in the past:

'Long years and centuries ago our fathers or the founders of our people drank, as they dreamed, of the blood of God. Long years and centuries have passed since the strength of that giant vintage has been anything but a legend of the age of giants. . . . Day by day and year by year we have lowered our hopes and lessened our convictions; we have grown more and more used to seeing those vats and vineyards overwhelmed in the water-floods, and the last savour and suggestion of that special element fading like a stain of purple upon a sea of grey. We have grown used to dilution, to dissolution, to a watering down that went on for ever. But Thou hast kept the good wine until now.'¹

XVIII

21 *And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with a*

¹*The Everlasting Man*, pp. 300, 301.

*mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down,
 22 and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of
 harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters
 shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman,
 of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in
 thee; and the voice of a millstone shall be heard no
 23 more at all in thee; and the light of a lamp shall shine
 no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom
 and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee:
 for thy merchants were the princes of the earth; for
 24 with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived. And in
 her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and
 of all that have been slain upon the earth.*

The casting of a great millstone into the sea as a figure of Babylon's fall may be compared, or rather contrasted, with the vision of the second trumpet; in which the coming of the Church into the world was represented by a great fiery mountain cast into the sea of man's unregeneracy. And we are reminded of our Lord's condemnation of those who shall cause His little ones to stumble,—‘it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea.’¹ This leading astray of God's people has been the precise offence of the harlot city.

The lament continues in language of exquisite pathos. What sorrow, what a sense of the city's silence and desolation is expressed in the words ‘no more at all’, six times repeated! Is it not clear from these verses that Babylon cannot be understood as representing any actual city in the world or any secular power at all? ‘The voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters’ takes our minds at once to the liturgy of the Temple

¹Matthew xviii. 6.

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worship. All this will have ceased. The candlestick has been removed from its place and the light shines no more. The converse of Christ with His bride has been silenced. Those who bought and sold in the Temple have been cast out, 'for with thy sorcery were all the nations deceived'. In the two passages from Jeremiah, from which the imagery of these verses is taken, it is of the holy city, of her fall and her promised restoration, that the prophet is speaking; and in the time of regeneration there shall again be heard in her 'the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride', to which will be joined 'the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord'.¹

Of the final verse the interpretation must be a spiritual one. It is a development of St. John's vision of the Harlot as 'drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus';² and the line of thought is the same in each case. Of all influences for evil in the world, that of corrupt religion is the greatest.

We are now at the end of the long central section of the book, which began in chapter VI with the opening of the seals. Its concern has been chiefly with the judgments and providence of God as revealed in the courses of the world and in the history of His elect society, the Catholic Church. The allusions to the ending of the times and to the final judgment have been incidental. A clear progression of thought is to be discerned throughout. As the visions proceeded, we have been aware of a gathering dramatic intensity, a deepening sense of the mystery of iniquity, a growing darkness. It is as though the seer, in being

¹Jeremiah xxxiii. 11.

²xvii. 6.

allowed to penetrate more and more deeply into the ultimate truths of God's will and purpose, sees with ever-increasing clearness the horror of sin. In our own lives this should be a mark of all spiritual progress. And so, in the Apocalypse, the darkness deepens, but the light also grows brighter as the book proceeds. The black night of Babylon's doom is as much a part of the divine order as the glorious sunshine of the heavenly Jerusalem.

V

THE PRELUDE OF VICTORY AND THE BINDING OF SATAN

XIX

- 1 *After these things I heard as it were a great voice of
a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah; Salva-*
- 2 *tion, and glory, and power, belong to our God: for true
and righteous are his judgements; for he hath judged
the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her
fornication, and he hath avenged the blood of his*
- 3 *servants at her hand. And a second time they say, Hal-*
- 4 *lelujah. And her smoke goeth up for ever and ever.*
- 5 *And the four and twenty elders and the four living
creatures fell down and worshipped God that sitteth on
the throne, saying, Amen; Hallelujah. And a voice*
- 6 *came forth from the throne, saying, Give praise to our
God, all ye his servants, ye that fear him, the small
and the great. And I heard as it were the voice of a*
- 7 *great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and
as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah:*
- 8 *for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us
rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the
glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come,*
- 9 *and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given
unto her that she should array herself in fine linen,
bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts
of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are
they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the
Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of*

10 *God. And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

A marvellous symmetry unites and balances every part of the Apocalypse. In chapter V we heard the chant of the heavenly liturgy in the adoration of the Lamb by the whole concert of creation. There ensued the long series of visions, beginning with the opening of the seven seals and concluding with the fall of Babylon, which forms the central section of the book. The doom of the harlot city was the climax of the whole sequence, and chapter XVIII closed upon a scene of total desolation.

Now, as in a moment, the darkness is gone; the glory of God shines round about and in the courts of heaven an anthem of joy and thanksgiving rings out triumphantly. The celestial music which preceded the opening of the seals falls again upon the ear; and as the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders had joined with the angels in celebrating the mystery of man's redemption, so now they acclaim the mystery of God's righteous judgments and the fulfilment of His will in all that has been revealed.

Like the action of what we described as the High Mass of heaven, this song of thanksgiving is the timeless counterpart of the Church's worship in the world here and now. It belongs to the whole Christian age; it belongs as much to the Church militant as to the Church expectant and the Church triumphant. All history is under the rule of God; and it is the mission of the Church to apprehend and to declare God's judgments, so that in every age men may rightly understand the signs of the times and humble themselves under His mighty hand.

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'Hallelujah; for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth.' The rendering in the Authorised Version is less strictly accurate, but its splendid rhythm is irresistible,— 'Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' That acknowledgment, that act of praise, is the foundation of all right thinking and all fruitful action in the world. It is the most fundamental of all acts of worship; it is, in a special sense, a recognition that the kingdom of God has already come amongst men, and it gives the assurance of the final and certain triumph of good over evil.

These verses, then, are not to be interpreted as referring to the termination of all things and the last judgment. That idea is not excluded, but the meaning is altogether wider. The fall of Babylon, though it will not be consummated until the end of time, is not to be understood as a single event in the unknown future, but as a type or symbol by which the whole course of Christian history is illuminated, a standard by which the true character of our Christian profession may be tested. God's judgment is an ever-present reality, to be discerned with awe and thanksgiving and with joy. It is for this reason that the company of heaven and the fellowship of saints, apostles and prophets were bidden to rejoice over the doom of the faithless city. 'O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth.'¹

But now a new cause of joy is revealed. The degradation of Babylon and the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem are complementary aspects of the same mystery. The marriage supper of the Lamb with His Bride cannot fitly be celebrated until the harlot has been cast out in dishonour. For the first time in the Apocalypse we read of this marriage; and, in St. John's characteristic manner, this first allusion is but a passing one. The elaboration of the figure and its

¹Psalms lxvii. 4.

full significance will not be revealed until Satan's power has been finally destroyed. All through the visions of the central part of the book we have been aware of a gathering darkness, a deepening of iniquity, as though evil had to work itself out in some terrible climax of retribution. We have seen the final doom fall upon Babylon; we are now to be shewn the defeat of Satan and his attendant spirits. But before these things are fully rehearsed, St. John gives us, as by anticipation, a hint of the glorious visions that are to come thereafter.

We see at once that the marriage supper of the Lamb symbolises the mystic union of Christ with His Church. In contrast with the meretricious finery of the Harlot, she, the true Bride, is clothed 'in fine linen, bright and pure'. The benediction is upon all those who, being called into the Church's fellowship, hold the faith in sincerity and steadfastness. And 'these are true words of God'; how overwhelming in its solemnity is this sudden interjection!

The curious episode, to be repeated later, in which St. John attempts to worship the angel who speaks with him, is open to several interpretations. It may be, as Cardinal Baronius suggested, that we should understand it as a deliberate exposure and refutation of the heresy of Cerinthus, St. John's former adversary at Ephesus. His errors consisted in exalting the angels to too great honour, teaching that the world was created by angels, that the God of the Old Testament was Himself an angel, and that our Lord, in His sacred humanity, was inferior to the angels. All this, of course, was a gross perversion of revealed truth. We may rightly venerate the angelic ministry, but St. John is concerned to emphasise that worship belongs to God alone.

'For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.' In Christ the ancient prophecies are gathered up and fulfilled;

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as it is written, 'To him bear all the prophets witness.'¹ And in the predication and witness of the Church the prophetic mission of the Holy Spirit is continued from generation to generation.

XIX

- 11 *And I saw the heavens opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make*
12 *war. And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems; and he hath a name written, which*
13 *no one knoweth but he himself. And he is arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood: and his name is called*
14 *The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen,*
15 *white and pure. And out of his mouth proceedeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of*
16 *Almighty God. And he hath on his garment and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

The unity of Christ with His Church is displayed under a different figure,—that of the warrior-king going forth with his armies to the conquest of evil. The imagery under which He is described is taken from earlier visions. As in the opening of the first seal, He rides upon a white horse; He is the faithful and true witness; His eyes are 'a flame of fire', as St. John had beheld Him in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; He is crowned in the plenitude of Kingship. His name which 'no one knoweth but he himself', signifies the mystery of perfect Godhead and perfect manhood united in His Person; as it is written, 'no one

¹Acts x. 43.

knoweth the Son save the Father'.¹ And we are also reminded that the deep things of God are beyond all human understanding; for His is 'the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory'.²

The garment 'sprinkled with blood' is an eloquent symbol of the sacred Passion. He is the true Word of God,—the perfect expression of the mind of the Father. His armies are clothed in the white linen of His Bride's shining array; for He who is the captain of our salvation is, under another figure, the spiritual bridegroom of the redeemed soul.

In earlier visions we have seen the significance of the 'sharp sword' and the 'rod of iron' and the winepress of God's wrath. Here these symbols are brought together as displaying the unity and harmony of all that has gone before.

Finally, upon His garment,—the 'garment sprinkled with blood',—and upon His thigh, where the sword would ordinarily be carried, there is the name written, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'. Let it be noted that, in these six verses, this is the fourth mention of His name. 'Faithful and True'; the secret Name known only to Himself; 'the Word of God'; and now, 'King of Kings and Lord of Lords'. There are profound depths of spiritual meaning in these words. Faithful to His promises to the chosen people, God has revealed things 'hidden from the foundation of the world'; the Word came forth from the Father and was made flesh, that all men might be made partakers of the everlasting Kingdom of Christ.

The great variety of symbols described by St. John in these verses recalls a comment made by Isaac Williams.

'It may be observed throughout the Apocalypse', he writes, 'that St. John always combines and intermingles

¹Matthew xi. 27.

²1 Corinthians ii. 7.

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his allegories and emblems. . . . As, for instance, the locusts are no locusts, for they distinguish between good and evil; the horses are no horses, for they have lion heads, breathing fire and brimstone; Babylon is no Babylon, because it stands on seven hills; the great city is no city, because it is in the wilderness; the warrior is no warrior, for His sword is not on His thigh as the Psalmist describes it, but proceeding from His mouth. The object of this rule is, no doubt, in order to prevent our connecting the thing signified with sensible images.¹

XIX

- 17 *And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, Come and be gathered together unto the great*
18 *supper of God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.*
19 *And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against*
20 *him that sat upon the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image: they twain were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brim-*
21 *stone: and the rest were killed with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, even the sword which came forth out of his mouth: and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*

The symbolism of these verses is both complex and, if we may say so with reverence, extravagant. The idea of a

¹*The Apocalypse*, pp. 401, 402.

sacrificial supper at which the righteous shall feed upon the flesh of the wicked is found in the prophecies of Ezekiel. Plainly no sort of literal or material interpretation can be satisfactory; we must look for the spiritual meaning conveyed by the symbols.

The angel standing in the sun seems to represent our Lord. And it may be that the 'birds that fly in mid heaven' signify that new life of the spirit by which all that is of the flesh is consumed, transformed and thereby consecrated to a higher service; for 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God'.¹ This great supper of God is 'for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus'.² It is the marriage supper of the Lamb under another figure; and those bidden to partake of it are all who have, in Christ, crucified the flesh and, in Him, are 'called and chosen and faithful'.

As we have been shewn the doom of Babylon,—not the final judgment, but a retribution that is ever being wrought out in this world,—so now we are to see the execution of God's judgment upon the first beast and the second beast, here described as the 'false prophet'. We have already discussed the significance of these two figures, and there is no need to repeat or elaborate what has been said earlier. Let us, however, observe that, as in the case of Babylon, there is no suggestion here of the last judgment or of the fires of hell. It is by the fire that Christ came to bring upon earth that all that is false and unworthy, all that dishonours God, all that is 'of the earth, earthy' must ultimately be consumed. It is by the sword of the Gospel that the spiritual forces of evil are to be finally destroyed. 'For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the spirit is life and peace.'³

¹1 Corinthians xv. 50.

²*id.*, v. 5.

³Romans viii. 6.

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XX

- 1 *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.*
- 2 *And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand*
- 3 *years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time.*
- 4 *And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image, and received not the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they*
- 5 *lived, and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years*
- 6 *should be finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.*
- 7 *And when the thousand years are finished, Satan*
- 8 *shall be loosed out of his prison. And shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*
- 9 *And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and*
- 10 *devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and the false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

This is an exceedingly difficult chapter. We shall do well to recognise at once that there are mysteries contained in it which we cannot hope fully to understand.

In chapters XII and XIII we were introduced to the three great adversaries of the Lamb of God and of His elect people. We saw the conflict engaged between the woman arrayed with the sun and the dragon with seven heads and ten horns,—‘he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.’ Then we were shewn, under the figures of the beast from the sea and the beast from the land, the second and third persons in this trinity of evil. These two enemies of Christ and His Church met their appointed doom in the chapter we have just read; we are now to witness, as a prelude to the restoration of all things and the coming of the New Jerusalem, the final overthrow of Satan.

Such, then, is the theme of the vision here presented to us. Our Lord is again displayed in the figure of an angel, having ‘the keys of death and of Hades’¹ and bearing the great chain with which He is to bind Satan in captivity.

It is the opinion of St. Augustine and of all the ancient commentators that this overthrow and imprisoning of Satan was effected from the moment of the Incarnation. By our Lord’s coming into the world and by His redemptive sacrifice upon Calvary the power of Satan was utterly broken. Until the consummation of the ages he is permitted to assault the souls of men, ‘knowing that he hath but a short time.’ But the triumph of Christ and of His faithful followers is already accomplished and assured. For them Satan is a foe already conquered and bound.

It seems clear that the thousand years of Satan’s captivity must be understood symbolically, and not literally. If this be conceded, we may begin by re-affirming the

¹i. 18.

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principle that symbols, and especially numerical symbols, must always be interpreted consistently. A number cannot symbolise one thing in one context and something quite different in another. Symbols are a form of speech, and are therefore subject to the rules that regulate the understanding of all speech. Moreover, in the Apocalypse, as we have already seen, numbers always have clear and definite meanings. We cannot suppose that the captivity of Satan for a thousand years means, in a vague and indefinite sense, that he will be bound for a very long time. Nor, again, is it satisfactory to suggest that the reference is to the whole Christian age until our Lord's second coming. St. John has already used a numerical symbol to describe the Church's time of witness and tribulation in this world; he has represented it as a period of $3\frac{1}{2}$ years (or 42 months or 1260 days), signifying, as we have already seen, a short, troubled time which is but a preparation for the fulfilment of our true destiny. In so careful a book as the Apocalypse,—one of the most orderly and consistent books ever written,—it is scarcely conceivable that a totally different symbol should suddenly be introduced without explanation.

We observe that the reign of the elect people, like the binding of Satan, is for this same symbolic period of a thousand years. This makes it even more difficult to believe that the Christian age is signified. The only satisfactory explanation seems to be that proposed by Milligan,—that the thousand years expresses no period of time at all. The idea to be apprehended is that of completeness. Satan is bound for a thousand years,—that is, he is completely bound. The righteous reign for a thousand years,—that is, the power of complete triumph over evil is already theirs, for 'this is the victory that *hath overcome* the world, even our faith'.¹

¹1 John v. 4.

Hence, as Milligan expresses it:

‘Alike negatively and positively, alike in the binding of Satan and in the reign of the saints for a thousand years, we have simply an ideal picture of what was effected by the Redeemer for His people, when for them He lived and suffered and died and rose again. Then he bound Satan for them; He cast him into the abyss; He shut him in; He sealed the abyss over him—so that against them he could effect nothing. . . . They live already a resurrection life, an ascended life; for it is a life hid with Christ in God, a life in that “heaven” from which the devil has been finally and for ever expelled. The glory which the Father gave to the Son the Son has given them. . . . He that was begotten of God keepeth them and the evil one toucheth them not. This is the reign of the thousand years, and it is the portion of every believer who in any age of the Church is a sharer in the life of his risen and exalted Lord.’¹

We have now to consider what is meant by the loosing of Satan ‘for a little time’ after the passing of the thousand years, and the corresponding statement that ‘the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished’.

Let us observe that nowhere in the Apocalypse is there any direct reference to the conversion of the reprobate. Everyone belongs either to Christ or to Antichrist; no increase or diminution in the number of the elect is anywhere suggested. In St. John’s teaching, the difference between the good and the wicked is a difference of nature; by their act of faith in Christ and by their incorporation into His kingdom the righteous have received a ‘new name’,—they are a new creation. Thus, the final coming of Christ in glory is, so to say, being constantly rehearsed and foreshadowed in the hardening of the hearts of some

¹*Lectures on the Apocalypse*, pp. 219, 220.

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and in the response and conversion of others. But the working-out of this process of division does not find a place in the drama of the Apocalypse; it is regarded as something already accomplished,—or perhaps we should rather say that it is seen in cross-section, caught in momentary repose, as in a snapshot of a moving object.

Now, we have suggested that the period of a thousand years is not symbolical of any space of time; the idea is that of a completed work of God. In the same way, although, in one sense, the loosing of Satan from his prison follows in time after the period of his captivity, the primary idea is not that of sequence, but of limitation. Satan's power is a limited power; all the forces of evil in the world are engaged in a losing battle, for the sovereign authority of the Kingdom of God has already been established. During the 'little time' of the Christian dispensation upon earth,—the expression has been used more than once before with this meaning,—Satan may rage furiously, but his ultimate defeat is certain. The vision is parallel to that of the Woman and the Dragon in chapter XII, where the casting down of Satan was followed by a great voice in heaven acclaiming the sovereignty of Christ and the reign of the saints. 'Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea; because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.'¹

Continuing this line of thought, we apprehend that the 'first resurrection' is to be understood of that death to sin and new birth to righteousness of which the apostle speaks;² and of which also our Lord declared that 'the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live'.³

¹xii. 12.

²1 Peter ii. 24.

³John v. 25.

But 'the rest of the dead', those who have no ears to hear the divine voice, cannot share in this new life. They cannot live until the thousand years are accomplished,—that is, until by the grace of God, they have been brought into the fellowship of Christ's new Kingdom.

We see, then, that the binding of Satan and the reign of the elect people of Christ are closely related, the one to the other. Our Lord came into the world to redeem the fallen estate of man; 'I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.'¹ It is this new life in Christ which St. John describes under the symbol of 'the first resurrection',—a regeneration of the spirit by which man is raised to a new stature. It is that new birth of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus,—'a mysterious force,' to quote Mr. Christopher Dawson, 'the power and reality of which are manifest, while its cause and working are as invisible as the wind.'² This is the sense in which we must understand our Lord's words concerning John the Baptist,—'among them that are born of women there is none greater than John: yet he that is but little in the kingdom of God is greater than he.'³

Over those who have received this divine gift 'the second death hath no power'. Their bodies are still under the bondage of corruption; the forces of spiritual evil in the world are still unsubdued, for Satan has been loosed for a little time; but, as members of the Church, they are citizens of a new world and partakers of a supernatural life whose fulness will be revealed in heaven.

It is of this risen life of the spirit that St. Paul is thinking when he declares that 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am

¹John x. 10.

²*Enquiries into Religion and Culture*, p. 327.

³Luke vii. 28.

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persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹ And it is the privation of that life, that condition of loss, of alienation from the whole divine order, of separation from God, that seems to be signified by the 'second death'. The second death is the antithesis of the first resurrection; and these things are a great mystery. Certainly we must not suppose that the interpretations which we have suggested exhaust the meaning of St. John's words. For example, a wider application is at once apparent if we compare them with St. Paul's teaching in the first epistle to the Thessalonians. But in these brief notes we must be content to follow a single train of thought which does, in fact, seem to display the primary meaning of the vision.

In these concluding visions we have the impression that St. John is gathering up the teaching of his earlier chapters, drawing together threads that may have appeared disconnected, and thus displaying the unity and harmony of all that has gone before. He alluded to the second death in the letter to the Church at Smyrna; to the reign of the saints in the letter to the Laodiceans and in the vision of the adoration of the Lamb; to the mark of the beast in the visions of the two beasts and of the Lamb on Mount Zion. Here, these symbols are assembled so that their relationships to one another and to a central theme are made plain.

It is not that St. John merely repeats himself. Throughout the book there is a progressive unfolding of thought and mystery. When symbols are introduced for the first time, they are often left without explanation or comment; their full significance is made apparent in some later

¹Romans viii. 37-39.

vision. A figure or symbol that seems incidental to one vision is found to be central in another. And, as the book proceeds, we see the parts being drawn together into a composite whole; until, as we approach the final chapters, we are able to recognise the marvellous order and symmetry, the perfect balance, by which every part of the book is held together.

Against the white-robed army of the King of Kings the hosts of Satan are gathered together from the four corners of the earth to the assault of the beloved city. The fire coming down from heaven for their destruction is that sacred flame which our Lord came upon earth to kindle,—a symbol whose significance we have already discussed.

‘And they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.’ The phrase ‘for ever and ever’, as in chapter XIV, v. 11, is better rendered ‘unto the ages of ages’,—that is, until the consummation of the times and the coming of Christ in judgment. Again, the casting of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire (which, as we shall read in a moment, is to be identified with the ‘second death’) seems to symbolise that condition of antagonism to God’s will, that tormented striving against His inexorable decrees, which is the special character of the operations of Satan. It is the condition of all who consciously give their allegiance to the world rather than to God; in a sense, it is the condition of the whole creation which ‘groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body’.¹

Thus, although St. John’s words allude in clear terms to the final damnation of the wicked, yet that does not

¹Romans viii. 23.

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exhaust their meaning. Certainly there is no warrant for reading this passage as the mere expression of vengeful satisfaction in the sufferings of the impenitent.

XX

11 *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled*
12 *away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in*
13 *the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them: and they were*
14 *judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the*
15 *second death, even the lake of fire. And if any were not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.*

It is at once apparent that in these verses the vision of God's judgment upon evil reaches its climax. 'The earth and the heaven' are fled away. Before the great white throne of the Sovereign Judge stand the dead; as it is written, 'we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of God'.¹ The books are opened that all men may be judged according to their works; and those whose names are not written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire. There is much here that is elusive and obscure, as befits the unfolding of so great a mystery. But it is plain that the allusion is to the final assize at the end of the world, and especially to the condemnation of the reprobate.

Even so, we are not to interpret this vision as lying

¹Romans xiv. 10.

entirely outside the realm of time or as referring to things which shall not come to pass until the present dispensation is ended. Alike in his Gospel and first Epistle, as also in the Apocalypse, St. John teaches most clearly and with the emphasis of repetition that the Last Judgment must not be considered as a single action belonging to the unknown future, but as the consummation of a process to which all history bears witness, if we could but discern it. The operation of God's judgment is continuous in every moment of time; 'verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.'¹ Nothing is independent of His sovereign authority; nothing falls outside the compass of His saving purposes.

'Now is the judgment of this world,' declared our blessed Lord in the moment before His Passion. In the sacrifice of Calvary we see the culmination of judgment upon the Chosen People of the old dispensation. It was in that instant that the old earth and the old heaven fled away in order that all things might be made new; it was in that instant that the book of life was opened; it was in that instant that the sea, the symbol of man's unregenerate nature, 'gave up the dead which were in it'; and it was in that instant that death and Hades yielded up their dominion before the coming of Him 'who abolished death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel'.² Finally, with the founding of the Catholic Church and her entry into the field of history, we are to see a new principle of judgment being unfolded. 'For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him. He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.'³

¹Psalm lviii. 11.

²2 Timothy i. 10.

³John iii. 17, 18.

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Henceforth the place of death and of Hades is in that lake of fire which is the second death; where also are found the three adversaries of the Lamb and all those whose names were not written in the book of life. Now a lake, as contrasted with a sea, conveys the idea of limitation; it may be that we are to see here an allusion to that limiting of Satan's power and of the operation of evil which was effected once and for all by our Lord's redemptive sacrifice upon the Cross. Let us further recall that the number 2 symbolises the idea of witness; possibly, therefore, the second death is to be understood of a failure in witness, those under its dominion being incapable of citizenship in the new heaven and new earth of Christ's Kingdom. The teaching of these verses is profoundly mysterious; but we can at least see that they have an urgent application, not only to the great movements of the Church's history, but to our own individual lives.

VI

THE GLORY OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

‘Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God.’¹ The last two chapters of the Apocalypse come as the fulfilment of these words of the Psalmist and as an answer to all the longings and aspirations of the prophets. Isaiah had looked forward to the creation of new heavens and a new earth, where the former things should not even be remembered; Zechariah had spoken of the time when ‘Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain’;² the measurement of the holy city had been described by Ezekiel,—‘and the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes of Israel . . . and the name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord is there’;³ of the New Jerusalem Isaiah had declared that ‘as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee’.⁴ All that St. John describes in these concluding visions must be seen in relation to the prophetic writings; for only thus can they be rightly understood.

We shall not make the mistake of supposing that the coming of the New Jerusalem is to be regarded as following in time on the destruction of Babylon and the defeat of the powers of evil. Any idea of chronological sequence would be quite out of place and is plainly forbidden by the manner in which St. John sets forth his vision of the heavenly city. We see him retracing his steps over all that

¹Psalm lxxxvii. 3.

³Ezekiel xlviii. 30–35.

²Zechariah viii. 3.

⁴Isaiah lxii. 5.

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has gone before, recapitulating much that he has already said, elaborating and enriching the imagery of earlier visions. Thus, in the letter to the Church at Philadelphia, it had been promised to 'him that overcometh' that he should receive 'the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God';¹ the secure peace of the white-robed multitude in the presence of the Lamb is seen to be the portion of all who dwell in the beloved city; the great refrain, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end,' is heard again; the Bride adorned for the marriage supper has made herself ready and now the mystical union has been consummated. All the scattered jewels of the book's teaching are here brought together in a single setting of surpassing beauty and splendour.

The question at once arises as to whether the heavenly Jerusalem is to be understood of the Church triumphant and of the life of the blessed hereafter, or whether the vision applies to the Church in her present pilgrimage in the world. And the answer cannot be in doubt, for it is clear that both meanings are included. Nowhere in Scripture are the joy and the glory of the future life represented with such assurance or with such wealth of inspired imagery; to read St. John's words again and again in this sense is better than any comment upon them. But, as we have had occasion to note so often in our consideration of these visions, we must not accept any one line of interpretation as being exhaustive; and whilst we rightly think of the holy city as a figure of God's perfected kingdom in heaven, we must bring into the foreground another thought, which is no less important,—that the New Jerusalem is already come and has been in our midst for nineteen centuries.

XXI

1 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and*
 2 *the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made*
 3 *ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the*
 4 *tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself*
 5 *shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no*
 6 *more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. And*
 7 *he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he saith, Write: for these words are*
 8 *faithful and true. And he said unto me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the*
 9 *fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he*
 10 *shall be my son. But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and*
 11 *sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.*

'And I saw a new heaven and a new earth',—new, not in the sense of newly fashioned and brought into being for the first time, but as signifying re-creation and fulfilment. 'The old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.'¹ God Who, in the beginning, had wonderfully created man, had now still more wonderfully renewed him. The sea, the symbol of our human nature in

¹2 Corinthians v. 17.

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its condition of alienation from God, is no more; for His promises of old are now fulfilled and His salvation is come amongst men.

‘And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.’ The words make it clear that the vision cannot be understood exclusively of the future life; for ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them and they shall be his peoples’. St. John has had much to tell us of the condition of the Church in the world; we have had the warnings and admonitions of the letters to the seven churches of Asia, the judgments of the seals and the trumpets, the vision of the Woman and the Dragon, and the judgments of the seven golden bowls. All these revelations were summed up in the terrible figure of the Harlot,—‘Babylon the Great, the Mother of the Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth.’ Therein was displayed the fulness of the mystery of iniquity. For Babylon, as was made relentlessly clear to us, represented the Church of Christ, the elect vessel of His salvation, in her condition of faithlessness and degeneracy. She whom He had chosen to be His Bride, had sold herself to the world like a common prostitute. ‘I swear unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine. . . . And I put a jewel on thy forehead and earrings in thine ears and a beautiful crown upon thine head . . . and thou wast exceeding beautiful and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God. But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by.’¹

¹Ezekiel xvi. 8–15.

In the context these words are spoken, not of Babylon, but of the city of Jerusalem. It was the holy city of God's chosen people that had stoned the prophets and, in the day of her visitation, cast out the Messiah and put Him to a criminal's death. We have already seen that, in the symbolism of the Apocalypse, Jerusalem and Babylon are not two cities, but one city. There are not two Churches, a true and a false, a divine and a human; the Church of all time, of which both Jerusalem and Babylon are symbols, is a single living communion. Under the figure of Babylon we have been shewn how deeply, throughout the course of her witness in the world, she has been corrupted by the wilfulness of man. Now we are to see the glory of her true nature. No one would accuse St. Paul of being blind to the human imperfections of the Christian communities under his care; but no Christian teacher, with the possible exception of St. John in these concluding visions of the Apocalypse, uses bolder or more exalted language in describing the Church's real character. The Church is neither the sum of individual believers nor the aggregate of the various Christian societies in the world; she is the elect Bride of Christ, nourished and cherished by Him as the husband cherishes the wife,—'a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, . . . holy and without blemish'.¹

St. Paul piles metaphor upon metaphor in order to emphasise the intimacy of the union by which Christ is bound to His Church; through this union He bears, so far as is possible, the same relation to individual members of the divine society that His own divine nature bore to His human body and soul. The Church, in fact, is His mystical body,—'ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof';² so that the Christian life is nothing

¹Ephesians v. 27.

²1 Corinthians xii. 27.

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else than the continuation and extension of the life of Christ in each one of us, and thence throughout the world.

This conception of the Church is elaborated by St. John in his description of the New Jerusalem. And if it be asked how the glories of this vision are to be reconciled with the delineation of the foulness and corruption of Babylon, we may perhaps reply that the Christian life, the true life of the Church, is essentially a hidden life,—a life ‘hid with Christ in God’.¹ In that sense, the true history of the Church can never be recorded; what she accomplishes is known only to God. Her hallowing touch upon innumerable souls all through the ages and in all the circumstances of our human state cannot be known by the world. But we must also insist,—and this is the primary point,—on the inviolable sanctity of the Church’s character. The Church is a holy society, filled with the glory of the Eternal Father, sharing in and continuing the life of the Redeemer, and sustained in all truth by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. For it is written, ‘The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them’;² and again, ‘I am the vine, ye are the branches’³; and again, ‘when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth.’⁴

No detailed commentary is needed upon the symbolism of this first part of the vision. For the most part the seer is recapitulating what he has already said and in this way assembling and summing up the teaching of the earlier revelations. In the beloved city there shall be no more death, for already its citizens are ‘risen together with Christ’;⁵ sorrow and mourning are passed away, for ‘your sorrow shall be turned into joy . . . and your joy no man

¹Colossians iii. 3.

³*id.*, xv. 5.

⁵Colossians iii. 1.

²John xvii. 22.

⁴*id.*, xvi. 13.

taketh from you'.¹ And all these things are already come to pass; the renewal of the world is already accomplished. But within the city is found no place for those who have rejected the light and given themselves to the deceits of Satan. The words are not to be understood of individuals,—no one supposes that the Church is intended to be a society of sinless people,—but rather of the Church's essential nature. 'Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.'² In this sense we are to see the Church as the vessel of the first resurrection; and all that is without is under the dominion of the second death.

XXI

9 *And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues; and he spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew*
 10 *thee the bride, the wife of the Lamb. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down*
 11 *out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a*
 12 *jasper stone, clear as crystal: having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are the names of the*
 13 *twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east were three gates; and on the north three gates; and on the*
 14 *south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them*
 15 *twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall*
 16 *thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length*

¹John xvi. 20, 22.²1 Peter ii. 9.

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thereof is as great as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal.
17 *And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man,*
18 *that is, of an angel. And the building of the wall thereof was jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto pure*
19 *glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third,*
20 *chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the*
21 *eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the several gates was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.*

St. John now passes on to a full delineation of the glory of the heavenly city. There is an almost breathless splendour in these verses; the vision of the New Jerusalem is the culmination not only of the Apocalypse itself, but of the whole Canon of the Scriptures.

The striking parallelism of verse 9 with the first verse of chapter XVII has already been noted; immediately before the unfolding of the renown of the holy city, we are once more reminded of the mystical identity of Jerusalem with Babylon, of the Bride with the Harlot.

The vision stands in no need of lengthy comments. The symbolism is not obscure, and we shall best apprehend its teaching by surrendering ourselves to the surpassing beauty of St. John's words,—reading and re-reading the chapter as a single whole and then passing on to consider the meaning of each clause in turn. Let it be noted how

the numbers 3, 4 and 12 recur time and again in the description of the city's fabric and dimensions,—3 as the number of divinity, 4 as signifying the perfection of man, and 12 as characterising the elect and consecrated city of God.

The twelve gates are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; for the Church is the new Israel and the fulfilment of the promises made to the patriarchs and prophets. The gates of the city stand open to the four corners of the earth, three in each cardinal direction; for the Gospel is to be preached to all nations, and he who receives the word of God is thereby received into a kingdom not of this world. 'And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.' The wall 'great and high' signifies the secure strength of the city, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail; so also the nature of the twelve foundations shews that the Church, being One and Holy and Catholic, is also Apostolic.

The measurement of the city, as we saw in discussing the vision of the Two Witnesses, symbolises the protecting care with which Christ watches over the Church in all her fortunes; 'I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me and I know the Father.'¹

'And the city lieth foursquare'; for by the Church mankind and all created things are sanctified. That is the primary significance of all Christian worship, and especially of the supreme action of the Mass. Note how the dimensions of the city are dominated by the number 12, as emphasising the mystery of the divine election,—'ye did not choose me, but I chose you.'² The equality of the linear measurements,—the length and the breadth and the

¹John x. 14, 15.

²*id.*, xv. 16.

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height all equal,—symbolises the harmony and order of the true Faith; for the Christian Gospel is no mere collection of doctrines and precepts, but a living body of revealed Truth of which, under God, the Church is the guardian and interpreter.

All the beauty of created things and of things fashioned by man have their place in the Church's life, and equally in her worship. Thus, the foundations (or courses) of the city's walls are adorned with all manner of precious stones, as signifying the graces and blessings of which the elect people are made partakers. Some commentators have seen special symbolic meanings in each of the twelve jewels enumerated; but it must be admitted that their interpretations are often too fanciful to be convincing. Perhaps we may regard the twelve precious stones as representing the twelve gifts of the Holy Spirit; or again, we may see them as symbols of the richness and variety of Christian sanctity as displayed in the lives of the saints through the ages. All that there is, and has been, in Christian history of holiness and goodness, all that there is of purity and grandeur in the Church's worship and in the unceasing flow of her interior life, the wisdom of an Augustine or an Aquinas, the physical heroism of a Peter Claver or a Francis Xavier, the burning charity of a Francis of Assisi or of a Vincent de Paul, the inexhaustible energy of a Bernard of Clairvaux, the profound but utterly simple faith of a Thomas à Kempis,—all is of Christ, who is continually finding new expressions of His all-embracing perfection.

The gates, each of a single pearl, and the street of pure gold, 'as it were transparent glass,' remind us of that 'pearl of great price' to which our Lord likened the kingdom of heaven, and of that shining purity which is the special character of the Bride of Christ,—a purity of faith and

heart which finds its fulfilment in words that we shall read in a moment. For, as it has been declared, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,' so now we shall read that 'his servants . . . shall see his face'.¹

XXI

22 *And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the*
 23 *Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof. And*
the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon,
to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it,
 24 *and the lamp thereof is the Lamb. And the nations*
shall walk amidst the light thereof: and the kings of
 25 *the earth do bring their glory into it. And the gates*
thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall
 26 *be no night there): and they shall bring the glory and*
 27 *the honour of the nations into it: and there shall in no*
wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh
an abomination and a lie: but only they which are
written in the Lamb's book of life.

The Church is a divine society. In every age her mission in the world is a mission of sanctification, the progressive penetration of the natural order by the supernatural. Her task is the restoration of all things in Christ; and this cannot be accomplished in the present dispensation. Nevertheless, the Church triumphant, the Church expectant and the Church militant here in earth are a single society, sustained by the same life and enlightened by the same Spirit. The glory which fills the Church here in the world differs only in degree from the glory of God's presence in heaven. Thus, to the Christian, the line of division is not between this world and the next, between earth and heaven, but between the whole natural order and the

¹xxii. 3, 4.

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supernatural, 'Ye are of God, my little children. . . . They are of the world,'¹

So vivid is St. John's sense of the unity of the Church that it is often difficult to say whether he is speaking of her condition in the world or of her continued life beyond the grave. In many cases it is evident that both estates are included, since there is no real separation between them. But there seems little doubt that these concluding verses of chapter XXI must refer primarily to the life of the blessed hereafter; that is the opinion of St. Augustine and other commentators, including St. Gregory the Great and Richard of St. Victor. Understood in this sense, St. John's words call for no explanatory comment. But it is worth observing that, apart from verse 22, which can only allude to the fulfilment of all things in heaven, all else that is recorded has an application to the Catholic Church in the world. In the Church, the 'new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,' is fulfilled that which had been declared by the prophet: 'Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. . . . The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.'² How gloriously are these words caught up and woven into the fabric of St. John's narrative, and how wonderfully, at the same time, are they transcended in his vision of the heavenly city!

'He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.'³ Three times in the course of these last two chapters of the book is the exclusion of liars from the holy city mentioned. The

¹I John iv. 4, 5.

²Isaiah lx. 11, 19.

³Psalms ci. 7.

words are to be understood of the absolute antithesis between falsehood, which is the chief mark of all things satanic, and the inviolable truth of the Gospel. More vividly than any of the other evangelists St. John seems to have apprehended this special character of our Lord's Person and message. It was not merely that 'grace and truth came by Jesus Christ';¹ truth is no mere abstract body of fact and doctrine. Truth can be fully expressed and realised only in a living Person. To St. John, our Lord was more than a teacher and revealer of truth; He was Himself the Truth, the incarnate Word of the Father, communicating and extending Himself in time and in space through His mystical body, the Church, so that 'they themselves also may be sanctified in truth'.²

XXII

- 1 *And he shewed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the*
- 2 *Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing*
- 3 *of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein:*
- 4 *and his servants shall do him service; and they shall see*
- 5 *his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.*

These five verses carry on without interruption from the previous chapter. In them the vision of the New Jerusalem is continued and concluded.

¹John i. 17.²*id.*, xvii. 19.

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'There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.'¹ We have seen more than once that rivers and fountains symbolise the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. That seems to be the meaning here. With St. Ambrose, we are to interpret the 'river of water of life' as a figure of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son,—or, as St. John expresses it, 'proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb'.

By the tree of life may be understood the Cross of Christ, and by the twelve fruits the saving merits of His passion and death; as it is written, 'Christ also suffered for you . . . who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, that we, having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness'.² Let it be observed that the word 'month' in the Apocalypse always suggests the presence of evil; in general, the symbolism seems to be that days are of God, years are of mankind, but months are of Satan. We may also recall that the term 'nations' invariably means the wicked or the unconverted.

It is thus clear that, in this part of the vision, the primary reference is to the Church in the world, ever going forth beneath the standard of the Cross to conquer the powers of evil, and ever calling men to repentance that their souls may be healed. The Cross upon the hill of Calvary marked the supreme moment of history; for it was the moment in which eternity and time intersected, in which God and man were reconciled and in which the truth about the meaning of human life in relation to God's sovereign purposes stood finally revealed. But, through the ministry and witness of the Church, that moment is perpetually renewed. At every moment of time the Cross stands erect in the field of history; the fruits of the tree of

¹Psalm xlv. 4.

²1 Peter ii. 21, 24.

life are renewed month by month, and in the shadow of its foliage there is shelter and refreshment for the healing of the nations. Thus, in the last chapter of the last book of the Scriptures, we are shewn, as we were shewn in the opening narrative of the Book of Genesis, the figure of the tree of life in the midst of God's garden in the world; and St. John also records the promise that 'to him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God'.¹

In that day of fulfilment 'his servant shall do him service; and they shall see his face'. It is the climax of all that St. John has written. It is the end and the goal of all human aspirations,—the unclouded vision of God; for it is true to-day, as it has been true through all the long ages of history, that, whether they know it consciously or not, 'all men seek for thee.'² One man will tell you that the hope of the world lies in the breaking down of economic barriers and in equality of access to markets; another finds his Utopia in political federation between the nations; a third looks to the restoration of the guilds and a fourth to the socialist revolution; a fifth speaks of a change of heart in social and political relations, a new spirit of brotherhood; and so it goes on. To all of them the Christian answer is the same,—'I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified.'³

By every variety of symbol and metaphor the glory of the city of God has been portrayed. She is the elect Bride of Christ, arrayed in robes of shining white. She is the strong city, standing foursquare upon the foundations of the apostles, her streets of pure gold 'like unto pure glass' and her gates adorned with pearls. The river of living water, 'bright as crystal,' runs in her streets; those who

¹ii. 7.²Mark i. 37.³Matthew xxviii. 5.

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dwell within her precincts are refreshed by the fruits of the tree of life. Finally,—and it is this figure to which St. John returns and upon which, characteristically, he concludes,—‘they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light.’

Such is the nature of the Holy Catholic Church, and such is the glory of the Christian heritage in this world and hereafter.

VII

THE CONCLUDING MESSAGE AND THE EPILOGUE

XXII

6 *And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true: and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to shew unto his servants the*
7 *things which must shortly come to pass. And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.*

8 *And I John am he that heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these*
9 *things. And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them which keep the words of this book: worship God.*

10 *And he saith unto me, Seal not up the words of the*
11 *prophecy of this book; for the time is at hand. He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still: and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still: and he that*
12 *is holy, let him be made holy still. Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to render to each*
13 *man according as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the*
14 *end. Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may*
15 *enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the*

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dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

These concluding verses form the last of the seven sections into which the Apocalypse is divided. The plan of the book shews a symmetrical grouping on either side of the long central section (chapters VI–XVIII) which dealt with the judgments and providence of God in the world. Thus, the celestial vision of chapters IV and V (the third section) is balanced by the visions of the binding of Satan and the reign of the saints in chapters XIX and XX (the fifth); the letters to the seven churches (the second section) correspond to the vision of the New Jerusalem (the sixth); and the prologue and introductory vision of chapter I are balanced by the final admonitions and the epilogue in this last chapter.

‘These words are faithful and true.’ We are recalled to the opening passages of the book; for that which St. John has recorded is ‘the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to shew unto his servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass.’¹ And as the apostle had invoked a blessing upon all who should read and hear the words he is to set down, so now the angel repeats the further benediction upon him ‘that keepeth the words of the prophecy’. ‘Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.’² For, as Richard of St. Victor observes,—

‘It profits nothing to come to the knowledge of the truth by reading or by hearing, unless thou strivest with all thy might to keep that knowledge in righteousness of life.’³

We have discussed elsewhere the significance of the curious episode, here re-enacted, wherein St. John is re-

¹i. 1.

²Luke xi. 28.

³In *Apoc. Joannis*, vii, 8; Migne, *P.L.*, cxcvi, 878.

proved for attempting to worship the angel who spoke with him. Note how in these verses the prophetic character of the book is emphasised. The Apocalypse stands to the New Testament as the writings of the prophets stand to the Old.

‘St. John’s prophecies’, says Isaac Williams, ‘are for the constant meditation of Christians, as of immediate fulfilment and most concerning to them,—a book which the Church has affectionately clasped to her bosom as her perpetual monitor, especially for these last days. He is the one great prophet of the Christian Church, supplying what the twelve prophets were to Israel; or rather, combining them all in himself, pointing their language and giving clear utterance to their many voices in one.’¹

The words of the prophecy are not to be sealed up, as though they referred to the far distant future or to things lying altogether beyond this world. ‘The time is at hand.’ God’s judgment is not delayed; it is to be discerned throughout the course of history and in all circumstances by which our lives are governed. The note of urgency is vibrant in these final verses. It is of ‘the things which must shortly come to pass’ that the apostle has written. ‘Behold, I come quickly,’—three times are the words of warning repeated. Whether some of the early Christians mistakenly looked forward to a speedy consummation of the age and to the second coming of Christ, is of no relevance here. The time is always at hand; at every instant the divine summons makes itself heard in what de Caussade called ‘the sacrament of the present moment’.

It is in this sense that we must understand the mysterious words of verse 11. Clearly St. John is not giving to the wicked and impious a sort of contemptuous permission to continue in their sins. He is summarising in a few words

¹*The Apocalypse*, p. 479.

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the teaching set forth in the three great serial visions of the Seals, the Trumpets and the Bowls. Evil is cumulative and progressive. It brings its own retribution; and that retribution, in whatever manner it falls, is an act of divine judgment, summoning men to see things as they are and to repent. But if God's warnings are disregarded, then there can be nothing else for it,—evil must work itself out to the full; the cup of the wine of the wrath of God must be drained to the dregs. 'He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness yet more; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy yet more,' until the terrible process of iniquity has been consummated. Until then there can be no hope of a true regeneration.

This is no counsel of despair. For in righteousness and holiness of living is the never-failing power by which all things may be restored. That utter devotion to God's service which we call sanctity is the greatest of all regenerative forces in the world. It is one of the clearest lessons of history that those who have conferred the most lasting practical benefits upon society have never been inspired primarily by motives of philanthropy or by any vision limited by the things of this world. Man has been best served by those who have best loved God; 'for so the ways of them which lived on the earth were reformed and men were taught the things that are pleasing unto thee.'¹ Herein is made clear the significance of St. John's exhortation to perseverance in the way of holiness. It is an amplification of the words of our Lord. 'Either make the tree good and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit.'²

'I am the Alpha and the Omega.' We heard this declaration at the beginning of the book, and now it is twice repeated as the closure approaches. He who is 'the be-

¹Wisdom ix. 18.

²Matthew xii. 33.

ginning and the end' of all things is the beginning and the end of all that St. John has recorded; for all proceeds from Him and to Him all returns. 'We may speak much, and yet come short; wherefore, in sum, he is all.'¹ There follows, in recapitulation of previous promises, the seventh and last of the book's benedictions; and the exclusion from the holy city of all violence and impurity and spiritual corruption and falsehood is re-affirmed.

16 *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.*

17 *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. And he that is athirst, let him come: he that will, let him take the water of life freely.*

18 *I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are*
 19 *written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.*

20 *He which testifieth these things saith, Yea: I come quickly. Amen: come, Lord Jesus.*

21 *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen.*

'Not only the angel and John have commended the words of this book to you,' comments Richard of St. Victor; 'but I, Jesus, commend them to you by the authority of my Name.'

He Who came in fulfilment of prophecy to inaugurate the new Israel, is Himself of the ancient royal house, coming into the world as the dayspring from on high, 'to give

¹Ecclesiasticus xliii. 27.

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light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.'¹

'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come.' The Holy Spirit, by Whom every act of prayer is inspired, alone can prepare us for the coming of Christ into our hearts. Therefore is His voice joined with that of the Bride in the Church's unceasing petition,—the cry of the elect people, 'earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God' and ever looking forward, according to His promise, to 'new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness'.²

'And he that is athirst, let him come.' How exquisite is the artistry by which the petition, as though answered, passes to an invitation! And this gift of the water of life is of no distant fulfilment; it is that restoration of the whole man, that birth to a new life in Christ, which is the portion, if he will receive it, of every baptised Christian.

Let us observe that the punishment which St. John invokes upon anyone who presumes to add to what he has written, is less severe than that promised to anyone tampering with his words by deletion or omission; for the 'plagues' of the Apocalypse refer to judgments in this world, whereas the loss of the tree of life includes the thought of final perdition. It may be that we are to discern an altogether wider application of these words. The history of the Church shews that the exuberance of popular devotion, by which pious additions may seem to be made to the defined body of revealed truth, may, if wrongly or negligently directed, lead to real abuses. But the mutilation or dilution of the faith is an infinitely more serious matter, turning the waters of the Spirit into a bitter draught and cutting men off from their part in the tree of life.

In response to the Church's prayer, we hear the final

¹Luke i. 79.

²2 Peter iii. 12, 13.

assurance, 'Yea I come quickly.' In words made familiar to us by St. Paul, the apostle imparts his concluding benediction. The drama has been played out and the book ends upon a note of peace and serenity. Upon the greatest scale that the mind of man could conceive or is capable of bearing, the panorama of Sacred History has been unfolded and the mysteries of God's providence revealed; yet, if the whole story could be told, 'even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written'.¹

¹John xxi. 25.

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